

Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History

Edited by ANN MCGRATH,
LAURA RADEMAKER, and
JAKELIN TROY



EVERYWHEN

New Visions in Native American and Indigenous Studies

SERIES EDITORS

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Everywhen

*Australia and the Language
of Deep History*

Edited by Ann McGrath,
Laura Rademaker, and Jakelin Troy

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EVERYWHEN

The Languages and Temporalities of “Everywhen” in Deep History

Ann McGrath and Laura Rademaker

Dhawra nguna, dhawra Ngunnawal. Yanggu gulanyin ngalawari dhunayi, Ngunnawal dhawra. Wanggaralijinyin mariny balan bugarabang.

—Acknowledgment of Country as taught by Tyronne Bell, 2019

Tyronne Bell, who spoke Ngunnawal when he welcomed us to his traditional lands, translated these words into English: “This is Ngunnawal Country. Today we are all meeting together on Ngunnawal Country. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the elders.”¹ That is, the elders of his lands in the past, present, and future. Though brief, his introductory words conveyed an Indigenous temporality, statements about a longer history, and the importance of its articulation in an appropriate language.

Tyronne Bell’s Welcome opened a two-day symposium titled Understanding the Deep Past across Languages and Culture. The inaugural public event of a five-year project, it was held at the Australian National University in Kambri/Canberra, the nation’s capital.² The Ngunnawal language could have been lost were it not for a revival project that began in 2014 in which Bell has been intimately involved. So many Indigenous languages have been silenced so quickly. Thanks to the forces of imperialism and settler colonialism around the world, many languages are now endangered. Violent displacement of Indigenous people from their land, the splitting up of families, and the removal and institutionalization of

children have been devastating for Indigenous peoples. Their languages were suppressed. Colonial authorities punished Indigenous people for speaking their own meaningful words—ones that held their land-based ontologies, key concepts, and knowledge.³ Soon, in many places, they were hardly even whispered.

Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History seeks to explore how Indigenous temporalities can offer alternative perspectives toward understanding the concept of time, a factor so central to the historian's craft yet so often taken for granted. Coedited by a Ngarigu linguist and two non-Indigenous historians of colonialism, our collection brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and knowledge experts. We have incorporated the latest research on Australian Indigenous languages and deep time, with the aim of mapping out some directions for future research.

Searching for tools to help us think differently about the past, we chose to reflect first on conceptualizations and experiences of time and place through language in the broadest sense—as spoken, sung, and visualized. We write this introductory chapter on Ngannawall Country, “Country” being a term in Aboriginal English denoting pride in belonging to certain places and long-held sovereignties. Sites of family and knowledge, they are abiding Indigenous domains.⁴ A word spoken with affection and emotion, Country denotes discrete tracts of ancestral, richly storied and nurtured land—an Indigenous or tribal estate connected with thousands of generations of people and their sovereign nations. Together, language and landscape amplify historical associations, reinforcing the authority of the land's custodians, which is based on a deep-time sense of belonging. Their appreciation of enduring ancestral connection with special places over a great span of time confers a unique historical vantage point.⁵

Fortunately, language revival programs are gaining momentum, boosted by the United Nations declaring the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019 and the United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032. Such languages are not altogether gone. They cannot disappear, for they belong to the land. They have been “asleep,” awaiting their awakening. Many Indigenous or First Nations people see language as a means of reconnecting with the grounds and waterways

of their tribal domains, their Nations. In a physical, spoken way, their mother tongues connect them with deep ancestral pasts. Some, like Tyronne Bell, are also inviting non-Indigenous people to learn these languages—to listen to the languages of the land.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and in parts of Canada and the United States, Welcome Ceremonies by the land's Indigenous custodians are increasingly performed in dual languages to open official events.⁶ These rituals recognize the deeper, longer histories of the lands occupied today. They also remind the audience of the dispossession and injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples. Often performed with music and in their language, Welcome Ceremonies demonstrate the continuous connection of Indigenous people to their Country. In Australia, sometimes a man will play the didgeridoo or *yidaki*, evoking the ethereal sounds of something far away but present, the immediacy of animal cries, the whispering of grass in the wind, or the movement of laughing children across a familiar landscape. Welcomes can also feature a local Aboriginal dance or singing group, including young children being trained up or educated in their culture. Welcomes can be solemn, but they can also be light-hearted and humorous. They can be moving and emotional; they may feel like a kind embrace, a warm gesture of age-old hospitality. The speaker will express respect for their elders and leaders “past, present, and future,” and respect for the land on which the event is being held. Matilda House, a Ngambri/Ngunnawal woman, often includes a slideshow of her family, explaining their land-connected histories. Her Welcomes usually entail a generous endorsement of any scholarly enterprise that promotes knowledge of Indigenous culture and history. Of late, she beats in time on a possum-skin drum to mark the formal part of her greeting. Her greatest aspiration is for Indigenous knowledge to be passed down to the future generations, especially to her Indigenous grandchildren.⁷

Like this chapter itself, Welcome Ceremonies are forms of introduction. A greeting ritual, they provide a history lesson for outsiders visiting Indigenous lands. In Australia the Welcome ritual has its roots in key Indigenous protocols practiced long before the European invasion and crucial to Indigenous Laws of the land. Whenever strangers visited Indigenous Country, a traditional owner or custodian acting as host would

address the ancestral spirits in the language of that place.⁸ Calling out to one's Country was and still is a form of introducing oneself and any invited guests to an animated, deeply layered landscape or waterscape. Everything within that Country—not only living things and humans, but also the hills and mountains, the rivers and lakes—pulse with stories in which all things are connected. In a reciprocal nurturing relationship, Country is kin. If you speak to it properly, it hears you; it listens.

Conducting a proper Welcome is fundamental to being a good host and ensuring that no harm comes to visitors. In some practices and places, the language of address, the respectful protocols, must be exactly right. It is potentially dangerous to travel into unfamiliar Country uninvited. The custodian of the land should address the spirits directly, making specific pleas for the safety of visitors. Without this, consequences might follow. When traveling, a visitor should switch over to the language for that Country. The “proper language” is one's passport, showing one's belonging in the land, offering safe passage.⁹ Many Indigenous people know several of their neighboring languages, of which there were about 250 before the British occupation in 1788.

To welcome us at our symposium Tyronne Bell brought a bag of ancient stone-cutting tools found in the Kambri region. Handmade objects manufactured many generations before, they provided a tangible connection with the hands and minds of his ancestors. Bell placed the ancient stones in our palms. As we held them, Bell explained his connection to his people of different times through story.

Story was once dismissed as mere legend or myth. But the word denotes Indigenous modes of history telling or historical practice—particularly those valued oral traditions associated with landscapes of significance. The word “story” is preferred to “history” because it has no need to be written down and because it is not *history* in the sense of being located wholly in the past. It is part of something larger, continuous and ongoing. Story can be about any and every time; it persists in and outside time, with time itself refusing to be pinned down.

Welcome Ceremonies such as Bell's stand in stark contrast to the mainstream ceremonies of settler-colonizer nations, in which key anniversaries memorialize European arrivals on specific dates, obscuring

Indigenous dispossession. When the European “discoverers” trespassed, uninvited and unwelcome, on Indigenous lands, they carried out certain performances to declare the assumption of sovereignty by an imperial Crown—flag-raising ceremonies, toasts to the king or queen, and the reading of royal decrees. Requiring speech, action, and a written record, these embodied articulations were officially recognized as enactments of sovereignty under the established conventions of the European Law of Nations.¹⁰ When James Cook’s *Endeavour* party declared British sovereignty over the east coast of Australia in 1770, he raised a flag and, in a conspicuous gesture, named the spot Possession Island.¹¹

Reminding us that Indigenous sovereignty was never ceded, Welcome Ceremonies are a means of performing Indigenous authority, underlined through use of the Indigenous language of the locality combined with the lingua franca of English translation.¹² In doing so local elders not only enact their own protocols but also speak back to a European legal system and culture. They are exercising a duty of care, a fiduciary duty arising out of their sovereign responsibilities. On another level the Welcome outlives the ruptures of colonization. It expresses a discrete and emplaced Indigenous temporality, an “everywhen” that lives on in a kind of eternal present, outliving the fleeting moments associated with anyone who happens to occupy a specific site in the present.¹³ Personifying the *longue durée* of sovereignty, Indigenous Welcomes draw outsiders into a shared understanding of cosmology and values. They are an invitation for the non-Indigenous people in attendance to see things differently. Speakers usually note the immediacy and felt presence of their ancestral connections and their deep-time past and that their people boast the oldest living culture on the planet. Memorably, they remind the audience that each of them is literally walking in the footprints of generations of their ancestors; they must do the right thing by the Country, for they, too, will be leaving their footprints behind.

In seeking to learn more about Indigenous conceptualizations of time and history, we wanted this collection to delve into both the music and the meanings of Indigenous languages. Several contributors to this collection reveal how place is understood as essential to Indigenous continuity, how it features in intimate autobiographical sagas of connection.¹⁴ Others

reveal how words, songs, and engravings in landscape are understood as an archive, as evidentiary proof of epic narratives, and as sites of their history's beginnings and the Law of the particular Indigenous nation, or language group, as they are often described.

We specifically asked the contributors what approaches and techniques they would use to explore ideas of time and especially of deep time; what kinds of teachings, insights, or evidence they would deploy; and how they might best critique what they gathered. We take "deep history" to include the histories that long precede modernity, the medieval era and the few thousand years generally known as ancient history. Significantly, however, we consider that deep history is largely Indigenous history, so it cannot be slotted into European history's existing archival boxes or temporalities. By reflecting on Indigenous concepts of time across various languages and artistic practices, we seek to inform a collaborative practice of deep history that might operate beyond culturally delimiting constraints such as the standardized chronologies of western dating systems or geological systems of periodization. We wanted to learn more about how Indigenous Australian ontologies challenge the fixity of linear historical chronologies.

The ways we speak of time are crucially important in the study of both archaeology and prehistory (a term increasingly out of favor).¹⁵ Yet historians and archaeologists often mistakenly presume that time is a given of nature, and yet infinitely measurable. We often fail to recognize that conceptualizations of time are culturally based and that modern (supposedly) universal time (the "homogenous, empty time" of Walter Benjamin) is a relatively recent aberration.¹⁶ Historian Vanessa Ogle's *Global Transformation of Time* and Souvatzi, Baysal, and Baysal's edited collection *Time and History in Prehistory*, along with various works of archaeologist Gavin Lucas, are valuable interventions that challenge such assumptions.¹⁷ American historiographer Peter Nabokov describes Native American pasts as "personal and ever present."¹⁸ In Pacific cosmologies, through genealogy, time can be understood as webs of connection.¹⁹ In contrast to western historical narratives, which often move along progress-oriented journeys toward modernity, Indigenous ways of understanding time eschew the flatness and linearity of timelines. As with their historical

practices, Indigenous expressions of the past take place across multiple sensory and performative modes, which reflect their particular takes on temporality. For many Aboriginal people time is neither exclusively linear nor cyclical but is “always.” In other words, Australian practices for knowing, remembering, and reenacting the past find embodiment in the present, blurring the distinctions of linear time and in some sense understanding the past as represented in a continuous now.

Nevertheless, for most of the twentieth century the way many national histories were taught in schools and publicly memorialized was as if nothing much happened until Europeans arrived. Implying that they had no notion of time or its passing, no story of adaptation, innovation, or change, Indigenous people were portrayed as having lived in a timeless land. Assumed to be historyless, it was as if Indigenous people all over the world were waiting for “History” to arrive, for continental histories to start. Textbooks and popular accounts portrayed the lands of the supposed New World as places waiting to be discovered and then conquered. Indigenous people were depicted as failing to use the lands to their capacity. Rather, it was often the early colonial enterprises that failed to thrive in these places or that survived only through the destruction of habitats and resources.

In settler-colonizer nations the dates of European invasion of Indigenous domains continue to mark the beginnings of national histories. Erasing the long Indigenous histories that preceded European arrivals, accounts of discovery and settlement were endlessly rehashed in school textbooks and in the ubiquitous statuary of their public places. Standard national history books continue to mark history’s beginnings with European discovery dates. They propound the great “monumental discovery narratives”: the arrival of Europeans such as Christopher Columbus or Lt. James Cook, the *Mayflower*, or the First Fleet of convicts.²⁰ What is more, these histories fulfilled a substantive legal function. Proof of discovery or of conquering was required under the Law of Nations to authorize an imperial power to take over the lands of another nation or people.²¹ As sovereignty was not automatic or necessarily permanent, it required repeated iterations and narrations. History books thus became powerful tools by which Europeans drew on written records and narrative

techniques to proclaim an imported sovereignty over Indigenous lands. European discovery “firsts” became an entrenched historical chronology constantly reinforced through place names, school textbooks, statuary, anniversary parades, and reenactments.

As we look beyond these bogus starting dates for history across the vast land masses of Australia and North America, the history discipline needs to be interrogated. The practice of academic history, starting out in philology or the interpretation of ancient texts, was primarily concerned with research into written documents. The history discipline still favors the written word, and most primary research investigates archives that use written text. Without such records, historians had concluded, it was impossible to narrate Indigenous pasts.²² Yet this overlooked the fact that the *Annales* school and more recent forays into environmental and visual histories, along with developments in multimedia, heritage, and museology, have developed techniques of historical analysis beyond the written text. Scholars of ancient and medieval history have often relied on material objects for their interpretations, and some are now applying genomic insights to historical questions.²³

Nonetheless, historians have largely left the Indigenous past to others. As the Indigenous ancient past was considered much the same as their recent past, the study of these peoples was left for anthropology, which focused on studies of culture. Archaeology and prehistory led the field in developing a range of specialist techniques for studying Indigenous peoples before European contact. This meant that history was separated from prehistory, reinforcing the idea that Indigenous people occupied a zone without history or before history.²⁴ Recent archaeological research is increasingly committed to collaborative approaches with Indigenous communities. Archaeology is making important breakthroughs, but as a discipline, historians need to intervene in addressing the marginalization of Indigenous people and worlds in history writing.

To make visible the missing persons and missing epochs in history, deep-history perspectives encourage us to look beyond the usual starting gates of European discovery and “first contact.” Surely, we argue, whole civilizations should not be excluded from world history. By expanding the span of “historical time” and eroding the boundary of what has been

considered prehistory, an expanded deep-history approach would enable the worlds created by Native and other Indigenous peoples to be included as an integral part of the story of humankind. But such an approach would need to take proper account of Indigenous history and historicities. We consider that this approach would offer more than an exercise in chronological or demographic inclusion, for it could potentially expand the intellectual parameters of the history discipline itself. Such a project would expand the scale of history, reaching back beyond European time zones—for example, beyond ancient history into deep history. But, we might well ask, why work within such conventionally defined time chunks at all? Historical accounts have routinely been divided by the reigns of kings or queens, the sovereigns, or the founding dates of nation-states and their rulers. Medieval historian Kathleen Davis dubs this the “sovereignty of periodization,” explaining that in historical works this narrative device serves only to reinscribe existing power structures.²⁵ If we are interested in challenging the dominant periodizations and chronologies that center Indigenous histories around key moments of colonialism and imperial takeover, we have to consider where to start.

Certainly, the vast scale of Indigenous history needs to be interrogated. In comparison with the relatively recent European migrations and arrivals in the New World, First Nations societies have lived on their lands for vast expanses of time. Writing deep history from Australia, with its sixty-five thousand years or more of Indigenous occupation, raises unique questions, some of which must be about scale and how this attenuates the nature of time.²⁶ This also raises intriguing questions about encultured ways of understanding time and the past. What do we even call them? We have the Holocene and Pleistocene to designate global climate trends, but might there be other, more local and more dynamic, less deterministic ways of conceiving variety, change, and continuity in this long past?

Above all, to appreciate this scale of history, scholars in the academy need to pay close attention to Indigenous agency and modes of historical practice—that is, to Indigenous regimes of historicity or historicities.²⁷ As with other Indigenous peoples, Australian perspectives on the deep past emphasize a profound kinship with a specific tract of Country, whose

trajectory incorporates not only the ground that we all walk and live on today but also its earlier formations and iterations, which include the sea, the stars, and the wider cosmos. Deep-time landscapes have agency; they transcend the human. And history is embedded within and inscribed on them. Rock art provides rich insights into the details of everyday lives, including astronomical knowledge, adornment practices, animal and plant life, and rituals. The landscape features themselves hold memory for future generations.

In this volume the contributors share such approaches with the aim of clearing pathways beyond the restrictive framings of colonialism. With the diverse range of Indigenous and disciplinary perspectives offered here, we aim to challenge existing historical mindsets. The contributors do not all agree with each other, but each shares our key project goal: in order to approach history more inclusively and honestly, each seeks to learn how to become more attuned to Indigenous concepts of time and people's experiences through time.

This collection explores Indigenous ideas of time and temporality from in-discipline and interdisciplinary perspectives, including Indigenous knowledge and standpoint perspectives, and from combinations thereof. We asked contributors to use their areas of specialization to consider how we might appreciate Indigenous conceptualizations of time and to challenge Eurocentric temporalities, requesting that they reach beyond their own disciplinary and knowledge boundaries. We invited contributions from Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous linguists who study Indigenous languages, Indigenous studies and art experts, musicologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians. Some are leading scholarly experts, and others are early career scholars. Indigenous knowledge holders hail from both inside and outside the academy. We understand that juxtaposing Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives along with some more discipline-specific and technical perspectives will inevitably introduce some sharp contrasts of style, but the various offerings complement and challenge each other. Such juxtaposed standpoints inform the reader about a range of approaches, which we hope will spark future dialogues across knowledge systems.

As Noongar musicologist and composer Clint Bracknell concludes in chapter 3, "At the very least, conceptualization of the deep past could

be reframed as something relational rather than linear.” Indeed, thinking through language, spoken and sung, has decolonizing potential, for it may open up new ways of thinking about history through time. As Bracknell explains, “By relating to each other and Country through old songs and language, we begin to escape the restrictive conceptual understandings imposed by colonization and maintained through the nation-state’s continued marginalization of Aboriginal values, concerns, and perspectives.” Repatriation of archival material, often scattered around the globe, and enhancing it and enriching it with community knowledge may “enable revelatory visceral experiences that unlock . . . relational understandings.”

When academic scholars and Indigenous knowledge holders engage in meaningful dialogues about history, conventional thinking is critiqued and expanded. By sharing approaches and insights, our discussions will unsettle standard forms of periodization and possibly conceptualizations of what constitutes history. By examining Indigenous ideas of temporality in language, we might broaden thinking of what history itself might be—at the very least, it can be seen as something beyond the temporal worlds of settler colonialism. We believe that the insights into the deep histories experienced by Indigenous peoples around the world could potentially transform understandings of how *time and the past* are appreciated and how *time works with place*.

For example, as Yawuru Elder Dianne Appleby of northwestern Australia explains in chapter 2, their seasonal calendar is not like a Western-style calendar with a progression of dates: “Everything has a season. There is *jalangardi* (goanna) time; *walgawalga* (salmon) time. This is how we measure our time.”²⁸ The six seasons represent “a continuous cycle of change from *Bugarrigarra*,” the word for ancient time of long ago or creation time. And, she explains, they are not past but still present, “part of our spiritual landscape.” Intriguingly, in the Yawuru language, one word, *buru*, encapsulates both time and space.

Spoken words and music, with their nuanced words, sounds, intonation, and elongated enunciations, can signal, echo, or evoke a sense of time. Such inquiry requires a multisensory and cross-cultural approach that respects personal Indigenous knowledge protocols. Contributors to

this volume explore the combined sensory and intellectual experiences associated with being on Country. Jakelin Troy's moving account in chapter 1 of being on the Ngarigu High Country of the Snowy Mountains, where she is "standing on the ground and writing on the sky," viscerally connects her with ancient traditions and, on a more global scale, with her colleagues among the Indigenous people of Pakistan.

GLOBAL AND DEEP-TIME PERSPECTIVES

Since the 1990s numerous historians have adopted transnational and global perspectives, wishing to move beyond the constraints of national histories. Although it is generally agreed that global approaches are necessary to address global problems, these have shortcomings. As Catherine Frieman explains in chapter 8, when archaeologists developed models that ranked social organizations worldwide, they placed the ancient peoples at the bottom of a hierarchy of stages from most to least simple, reinforcing racialized assumptions. Frieman demonstrates that archaeology has also divided deep time into a "punctuated temporality" of technological stages, such as the Bronze Age, the Stone Age, and other technologically oriented categorizations.

In the relatively new field of deep history, the appropriate periodization tools have yet to be formulated. Using the climatic periodizations formulated by geologists, for example, risks turning attention away from human agency and regional variations. For deep-history projects, history's organizational principles require reconfiguring.²⁹ To rise to such challenges we need to think creatively and collaboratively, both within and across disciplinary knowledge barriers. We need to be prepared to adapt historical methodologies, to experiment with newer methodologies, and significantly, to learn from Indigenous knowledge. Above all, historians should be willing to take risks and potentially fail.³⁰

Today scholars of history, Indigenous studies, and other humanities aim to address significant historical questions anew—big questions about the future of the human family, species extinctions, and the incremental devastation of our common home. The world, after all, is facing catastrophic climate change. Many nations confront crises of institutionalized racism and many forms of social injustice, including the oppression of women,

people of color, and Indigenous peoples. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have created momentum for change across the United States, Europe, and Australia. Social inequities reflect sustained historical legacies, requiring informed understandings of the past. Given these global challenges it seems even less appropriate to start any human story with Europeans and their so-called discoveries of the New World.

In recent years leading historians have called for the discipline to move beyond its delimited temporal scale, with its research focus of a few decades or centuries. They need not have told this to Indigenous peoples, who, through the lens of their *longue durée* traditions, already take a long view of themselves and the wider world. As scholars we are inspired by the work of Andrew Shryock and Daniel Smail in deep history. They convincingly challenge the division of history from prehistory, and through close collaboration with scientific researchers, they expand history's parameters. Our work is further buoyed by David Christian's "Big History" perspectives, as well as the calls by Jo Guldi and David Armitage and others for historians to adopt a larger temporal scale and scope.³¹ Yet we are cautious, too, aware of arguments that an expansive scale will weaken the discipline of history's methodological strengths.³²

Additionally, the influential work of the deep history and Big History authors does not take account of the contrasting explanatory frameworks of historical causation operating in different cultures, as elaborated, for example, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*. The problem with sweeping surveys and big-picture histories is that they could potentially resurrect grand narratives—ones that are European, masculinist, and exclusionary. Scientific enlightenment and evolutionary notions of cultural and technological complexity can reemerge as pivotal plotlines in which, unfortunately, Indigenous worlds tend to be either relegated to a footnote or obscured altogether.

Indigenous storytelling and modes of historical practice often emphasize the virtues of continuity rather than change. Although there are exceptions, they do not necessarily publicize breakthroughs and new inventions, instead giving preeminence to the "always" nature of certain phenomena. They assume the embodied nature of memory, with stories painted on the body representing human-place relationships in

the past and present. And they stress the role of place as a mnemonic device. These practices evoke the tangible relations of materiality—of bodies dancing and moving in and through space, and in relationship to geology, geography, and the animal and plant worlds. They are not about humans *and* nature or humans and objects, but rather encompass a profound and intense connectedness with everything, animate and inanimate, that resides in specific environments though not necessarily in any specific time.

EVERYWHEN

We were attracted to the term *everywhen* because it conjures the multi-layered Indigenous Australian notion of time as a kind of eternal present. What is meant by *everywhen*? In his 1956 essay the anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner uses it to encapsulate the temporal element of what his teachers, Muta, a Murinbata man, and Durmugam, a Nangiomeri from the far north of the Northern Territory of Australia, understood as *the time of “the Dreaming.”* Dreaming was an English translation to describe an Indigenous ontology of the past, present, and future.³³ As with various North American tribes, Indigenous Australians’ dreams and visions delivered revelations, including complex interpretative stories about the past and present—in other words, forms of historical interpretation.³⁴ Stanner notes that people did not see a separation between mind, body, spirit and personality, name, totem, and features in the landscape.

In Western eyes the Dreaming is often mistakenly understood to encompass a sacred heroic time and “the indefinitely remote past.” Rather, it is also part of the present and the future. It could not be fixed in a particular “before” time. Stanner describes the larger concept, the Dreaming, as “a kind of narrative of things that once happened; a kind of charter of things that still happen; and a kind of logos or principle of order transcending everything significant.”³⁵ Critics have been skeptical of the term Dreaming, partly because of its links with anthropologists who drew on Western psychoanalysis.³⁶ For many Indigenous people it makes sense as a fitting translation; it mirrors an ontology of revelations and songs that emerge in the present via visions and dreams. To recognize Indigenous history, the prominent soprano Deborah Cheetham, a

Yorta Yorta woman, requested that the term Dreaming be included in the Australian national anthem.³⁷

The concept of everywhen unsettles the way historians and archaeologists have conventionally treated time—as a linear narrative that moves toward increasing progress and complexity. Indigenous curators of recent art exhibitions have used everywhen to link ideas of place and time. The curators of *Belonging: Stories of Australian Art*, an exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia in Kambri, Canberra, eloquently defined it as the Indigenous notion of time “in which past, present and future exist as one and time does not pass moment after moment. Instead, time exists in an active relationship with the natural and ancestral worlds, and present and future events and experiences are shared with [those of] the past.”³⁸ In 2016 guest curator Stephen Gilchrist, a Yamatji man of northwest Western Australia, titled his exhibition at the Harvard Art Museum *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia*. It featured large canvases, several painted on the desert earth, on which the artists portrayed the complex stories and features of their Country, their sovereign estates. In vivid acrylics and natural ochers, these artworks reflected Australian Indigenous conceptualizations of time as defined by intimate encounters and associations with interconnected ancestral and natural worlds.³⁹ The many-layered paintings illustrated personal and collective biographies, the land’s ancient stories, and the Law, with the land itself, their Country, being the memory archive and the arena for storytelling.⁴⁰

Being in landscape and experiencing one’s body and one’s voice as part of a landscape—the touch of wind on one’s skin, the smells, sounds, and sights of a place—are among the ways in which Indigenous people experience, research, and perform history. Being on Country and performing history is healing. The Native American writer Donald Fixico discusses this eloquently in his book *Call for Change: The Medicine Way of American Indian History, Ethos, and Reality*. The land is the theater of storytelling and itself the storyteller—it provides proof, containing relics of the deep past, and it activates a living history. Words spoken or sung and dances reenacted in that landscape really matter, for there is an iterative relationship among the place, the present generations, and

ancestral beings. Country enhances the Indigenous sense of continuity. The land remains a creative, animating force, generating people, animals, and geographies. Through a temporality that embraces continuity and a legacy for future generations, shared Indigenous narratives of place endorse the need for the land's ongoing maintenance and nurturing.

We do not wish to imply that Indigenous people are unaware of time passing or of discrete chunks of time, a point clearly made in several chapters. While we see value in the time-bending concepts of the Dreaming and everywhen as general terms, it would be naive to think that any one English word could stand for the complex array of Indigenous knowledges, philosophies, and poetic expression interwoven in Indigenous notions of time, history, and place. To select one Indigenous word out of over two hundred Australian Indigenous languages and various dialects would be equally inadequate. At the same time, using an umbrella term should not be taken to imply homogenization of cultures across the hundreds of groups and territories of the Australian continent. Time and place concepts have different nuances across Indigenous nations, which are expressed in their own languages and in meticulous efforts at English translation.

In chapter 2 of this volume Sarah Yu and her contributors, for example, discuss how the Yawuru term *Bugarrigarra* encapsulates past, present, and future in a world both physical and metaphysical. Bracknell critiques the term Dreaming in chapter 3 and explores the divergent meanings of words with similar functions in various Indigenous languages. The Pitjantjatjara word *tjukurrpa* or *jukurrpa*, which has become somewhat emblematic, conveys Aboriginal conceptions of the past as alive in the present. It indicates a model for Law and a moral universe, defined as “an eternal process which involves the maintenance of these life-forces, symbolized as men and as other natural species.”⁴¹ To convey a similar meaning, the Noongar of southeastern Western Australia have no single word but use a range of words rich in metaphor: *biet*, which is associated with “track,” “sinew,” or “energy”; *kooranap*, “the place where the dead go”; and *bietiya*, “a person who knows the way or the Law in Country,” which is closely associated with *maat* or “kin relationships.” These words encompass ontologies that envisage specific places and the purposeful

journey routes, people, and multilayered time sequences that connect them.⁴² Their philosophically complex land-based ontologies do not separate mind, spirit, and the self from nature. Rather, they represent a temporal notion embedded in landscapes of journeying, of human action and kin connectedness, of which entanglements with the more-than-human world are elemental. These inform their precepts of Law, narrativity, and historically oriented performance.

Several authors in this volume elucidate how the cadences of Indigenous music and song collapse time. Creative ancestors traveled across the landscape, singing in language as they went. Indigenous songs and dance re-present these ancestors. Journeys and travel are core to Indigenous Australian cosmologies; song and spoken performances traverse and fuse landscapes and networks of story. Consequently, the terms “song-lines” and “songcycles” are useful descriptors for stories of a continuous past-present embedded in landscapes of mobility, sites being revisited and reenergized through song, dance, and art.⁴³ The Gay’wu women, a collective of Yolŋu women and non-Indigenous scholars, explain how the term “songspirals” describes their understanding of their past: “We call them songspirals as they spiral out and spiral in, they go up and down, round and round, forever. They are a line within a cycle. They are infinite, they spiral, connecting and remaking. . . . Our songs are not in a straight line. . . . They do not move in one direction through time and space. They are a map we follow through Country as they connect to other clans. Everything is connected, layered with beauty.”⁴⁴

Indigenous journey routes across the landscape are dotted with an ancient art archive that records ceremonies, animals, and what might be termed “creation stories”; they are both historical and present-day stories, present in the now and the then. As D’harawal woman and Indigenous studies scholar Shannon Foster explains in chapter 12, rock engraving was a vital aspect of kinship transmission of knowledge across generations. Her father taught her to protect and learn from *Narinya*, their “living Dreaming,” to be a Knowledge Keeper of *Garuwanga Waduguda*, their ancestral knowledges. With this in mind her chapter takes us on a trip to view the rock art engravings around Sydney, on her traditional land, which, as she explains, teaches her people not so much about the past but about an everywhen.

This collection stems from a particular interest in the challenge of deep history for Australia, but also of deep history on a global scale. Our intention is to offer not only insights for potential comparison but also ones we anticipate are of common conceptual value. Settler-colonizer states, whose national foundations were based on acts of dispossession, share many common themes. Australia's deep history also presents a valuable window into the global deep past. Dating of the Madjebebe shelter in Kakadu in North Australia took the occupation dates of Indigenous Australians on the continent back to at least sixty-five thousand years, and researchers believe deeper excavation will reveal older campsites.

Given the colonial and nation-state's failure to recognize Aboriginal sovereignty through treaties or an adequately recognized political voice, Indigenous people value the Western science that provides evidence of their enduring sovereignty. But more important to them are Indigenous practices for sharing their histories. Indigenous representatives from around Australia have called for a national truth-telling that encompasses both recent and deep histories. This was a core demand of the milestone 2017 "Uluru Statement from the Heart," the culmination of a lengthy consultation process. The Indigenous signatories cite the dating of science, but on equal terms with Indigenous knowledge criteria: "Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial,' and according to science more than 60,000 years ago."⁴⁵

The Uluru statement reveals the way Indigenous people deftly move across historicities and conceptions of time. They simultaneously engage with and strategically deploy multiple temporalities to make claims and to demonstrate that their deep history has political salience. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples emphasizes that Indigenous culture, heritage, and history should be protected;

representatives from around the world understood how the destruction of significant sites and histories constituted attacks on Indigenous sovereignty.⁴⁶

A more sophisticated appreciation of Native and Indigenous approaches to the telling of history and understandings of time will widen the frameworks for understanding the human experience of the past. Ancient memory narratives—stories, legends, and cultural mapping—need to be recognized as important expressions of Indigenous historicities.⁴⁷ They inform the place of the self in time and landscapes, and introduce imaginative spatial approaches to storytelling regimes. The power of works such as Lisa Brooks's *Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* demonstrates the value of using Native writing and close knowledge of kin networks and specific environments in storytelling. Brooks also incorporates less familiar historical source materials, and her more recent book *Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip's War* uses maps and rare documents to decolonize the space of the colonial northeast. Informed by environmental knowledge, Susan Sleeper-Smith's *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio Valley, 1690–1792* brings to life the women's economic autonomy, adaptability, entrepreneurship, and success. It unsettles static preconceived definitions of where they stood developmentally and highlights how their deep knowledge of the river shaped their survival.

Refusal to engage with or learn from myriad interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches could lead to a stagnant or even fossilized disciplinary practice. To probe deep histories, scholars might have to develop some of the skill sets currently being taken up by academic researchers of ancient and medieval history, such as in material culture and genomics. They might need to develop expertise in geological dating, the analysis of rock art, and several other forms of Indigenous material culture in which the discipline of archaeology specializes. Nancy Shoemaker's edited collection *Clearing a Path: Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies* foreshadows various enhanced methodologies for researching Native histories. It emphasizes the richness of tribal history-telling approaches and creative writing. In chapter 9 of this volume Worimi historian John Maynard discusses the value of Indigenous

stories for deep history, pointing out the way in which numerous Indigenous accounts of ocean inundation and climate change appear to be verified by recent scientific research. In a contrasting analysis in chapter 10 anthropologist Peter Sutton explains why Indigenous epic narratives are a distinct genre that elides simplistic analyses and calls for critical reflection.

The use of oral communication and other symbolic language is a defining aspect of human history. As an embodied practice, oral communication is a medium in itself, with its own valued qualities. It is not necessarily meant to be transcribed onto a page, nor can it be fully represented in writing. Like music, spoken histories pierce the air. They are multisensory, speaking not only in the special timbre and quality of sounds and rhythms vibrating from one person to the next in a particular place but also in the visual languages of decorated, painted, and adorned human bodies, faces, and hair in ceremonies and dance.⁴⁸ And the stories are woven in baskets and engraved in rocks. In the process of crafting and exchange, movable material objects follow songline journey routes, guiding, amending, and reorienting the deep-history narratives.⁴⁹ As argued by various contributors to this volume (Troy, Yu and contributors, and Bednall), interrogating the broad concept of language in a more holistic, situated, and embodied way carries innovative potential.

In positioning languages in the spoken sense as a key focus in this volume, we started up a deep-history conversation with linguists and Indigenous language speakers. As researchers who wish to probe the history of deep time, we certainly face many challenges—methodological, historiographical, and ethical—but we gain insights from interdisciplinary excursions and international perspectives. At the same time, attempting to integrate interdisciplinary insights without reference to appropriate expertise is inadvisable. While we hope that layers of meaning might be found in studies of language, some contributors, including Michael Walsh and Harold Koch (chapter 6), are skeptical of the ability of linguistic research to reveal insights into deep history.⁵⁰ Marie-Eve Ritz and Maïa Ponsonnet (chapter 7) share their skepticism on the potential of grammatical structures and tenses to reveal cultural insights into Indigenous conceptualizations of time. These perspectives are instructive, cautioning

researchers about the dangers of assuming cultural differences based on formal grammatical conventions that do not necessarily reflect cognition.

The academic discipline of linguistics knows its own limits here. But as other contributors demonstrate, many kinds of knowing flow from language. We learn that using the language of the Country is spiritually satisfying and empowering. As Yu and contributors explain in chapter 2, knowing the Yawuru stories, being in place, and above all, learning and speaking the language of that place can generate a strong sense of well-being and connection with the deep past. Having almost entirely lost the language as a result of government assimilation policies, people who recently learned Yawuru recount how they have found a sense of self, a reassuring sense of identity and community. They learned a word to describe this experience: *liyan*, a sense of feeling whole, strong, nurtured, and renewed. Through the grounding of the spoken word, its musical properties, and the poetics of its nuanced vocabulary and structures of meaning, the Yawuru people enjoy a profound sense of connection with a long line of respected ancestors.

THE COLLECTION

The multiple voices in this book all address the challenge of deep history across time and across languages. Through first-person explanations from Indigenous expert practitioners and discussions from academic researchers, the reader will witness almost firsthand Aboriginal people's modes of practice for knowing the past and will encounter how Indigenous epistemologies challenge those of the academy. As editors, we are pleased that contributors to this volume include scholars and Indigenous knowledge practitioners interested in archaeology, anthropology, art, linguistics, narrativity, musicology, and history. To map out new methodologies and approaches, our perspectives will be further enriched by combining forces with a wider global community of scholars.

We hope that this volume will stimulate a conversation about the languages of time across traditions and cultures, within and beyond the academy. Through *Everywhen's* reconsideration of the languages of time—particularly through spoken words, song, music, and art—we aim to inform and inspire a broad range of scholars interested in Native

and Indigenous pasts. While we especially hope to enrich the history discipline by exploring new perspectives on the deep past, this interdisciplinary collection is certainly not intended exclusively for historians or for Australian specialists. Probing the topic of language and time across deep history and across several of the Indigenous groups of Australia, the collection not only offers comparative insights but also raises matters of common conceptual value to scholars elsewhere.

The three sections of the book explore language both as a means of knowing and transmitting the past across generations and as source material for historical investigation. The first section, “Songs of Country in Time,” discusses Indigenous ways of maintaining ancient traditions and identities through affective, visceral experiences of place and song. To recover a fresh understanding of deep histories in alpine Country, in chapter 1 Indigenous linguist Jakelin Troy uses oral history, archaeology, and the documentary histories created about and by Ngarigu peoples. She explores how historical linguistics could provide insights into the study of deep history and how Indigenous languages express and articulate concepts of time and history. Western Australia-based scholars Sarah Yu and contributors demonstrate in chapter 2 how Yawuru concepts of time are expressed through Yawuru *nan-ga*, the cycle of their seasons, which correlates with an epic narrative tradition that disrupts Western historical perspectives. Through the rhythms and words of Aboriginal songs, in chapters 3 and 4 ethnomusicologists Clint Bracknell and Linda Barwick specifically explore how the past remanifests in the present.

The second section, “Time’s Archive? The Language of Words,” considers whether language can shed light on deep pasts. Linguistic research is by nature dependent on close collaboration with Indigenous communities, whose speakers are the instructors. These projects are warmly endorsed and much valued by Indigenous communities, who are anxious that their languages might be lost. Reflecting the methodologies of the linguistic discipline, some contributors adopt a more technical approach, which we feel is instructive, for it enables the reader to observe and follow how academic linguists approach and analyze their subject matter. In chapter 5 linguist James Bednall explores words and concepts around time in the Anindilyakwa language of North Australia, revealing how

their words about time are linked closely to notions of space. Both are bound up in knowledge of and relationships with Country and kin. In chapter 6 senior linguists Michael Walsh and Harold Koch provide a rigorous critical analysis that addresses the complexities of using linguistic studies to inform questions of the deep past. Marie-Eve Ritz and Maïa Ponsonnet add to this in chapter 7 by considering the relationship among certain grammatical tenses for past, present, and future and whether these reflect culturally particular perceptions of time. As languages are deeply embedded in complex cultural systems, the authors point out the difficulties of using linguistic structures as a proxy for thought.

The third section of this book, “Transforming Times,” explores various ways of conceiving of time across disciplinary boundaries and across cultures, revealing how the experience of time is mediated by changing disciplinary norms and embodied practices. In chapter 8 Catherine Frieman explains the Eurocentric chronologies and perceptions of time that have shaped the discipline of archaeology, including the cultural-technological evolutionary frameworks that imposed particular values onto Indigenous peoples. Frieman shows that these frameworks distorted understandings of First Nations pasts as static, primitive, and lacking innovation, and she calls for better ways of conceiving the deep past.

In chapter 9 historian John Maynard, a Worimi man from New South Wales, considers the topic of time and space for Koori people (Aboriginal people of southeastern Australia). He tells the stories of Indigenous Australians who witnessed dramatic geological and climatic changes—knowledge that takes them through the climatic zones of the Pleistocene to the Holocene and beyond. These stories include the formation of new rivers, bays, and islands; rising oceans; ecological transformation; and even the eruption of volcanoes. Arguably ahead of Western science in certain respects, Aboriginal ancient memory perspectives, including understandings of physics, geography, and other systems, were based on observation, invention, and experimentation over deep time. As Maynard concludes, “The knowledge carried across sixty-five thousand years may well be our best defense against a growing global catastrophe. Let us hope that those in power begin to listen before it is too late.” But listening, we must remember, requires sensitivity and might not always be straightforward.

In chapter 10 linguist and anthropologist Peter Sutton scrutinizes multiple versions of Wik stories of early encounters with the Dutch in northern Queensland. In these stories time is fluid; Western-style historical chronology is suspended. It is not the chronology of events that matters, but what the stories say about people and the land. Aboriginal stories are not to be understood as static historical sources but appreciated as lively and dynamic.

Using examples from a range of Christian missions, Laura Rademaker in chapter 11 traces how Aboriginal people have grappled with temporalities brought by colonizers that were different from their own, though perhaps not always as different as the colonizers made out. She reveals how Aboriginal people imaginatively reworked missionary teachings about time, navigating colonizers' intrusion by asserting their continuing intellectual sovereignty. In this regard their key interpretations of eternity and of their own past are particularly revealing, for Indigenous people theorize their own temporal concepts as being congruent with Christian notions of eternity. They also saw the saints—a living presence of long-dead people—as a parallel to Indigenous belief in the creative actions of ancestral spirits. As Shoemaker pointed out in her 2019 address on Indigenous history, it is important to note areas of cultural sameness as well as difference, and to draw on the strengths of the history discipline in order to take up new challenges.⁵¹

Finally, in chapter 12 Shannon Foster narrates how D'harawal people of the Sydney region uphold a living heritage today. Conveying an arresting sense of connection with ancient places, she takes us on a journey through her Country, observing engraved traces in rocks that are now submerged by overgrown vegetation. For Foster, walking on Country suspends the colonizing ruptures and traumas of the past. Reconnecting with rock art and recounting stories in time, including that of the D'harawal's sacred animal, Gawura, the whale, and that of Kai'mia, the GyMEA lily, become important ways for her to fulfill her custodial responsibilities.

The discussions contained within the collection might inspire readers to explore Indigenous concepts in many languages equally rich in metaphor, philosophy, and knowledge of Country. Much more thinking and

talking needs to be done on the languages of deep time and deep history. Indigenous-created languages of time might spark new research journeys, across the disciplines and knowledge systems, and ignite transformative histories that stretch beyond our current parameters for history time. Reclaiming words and reflecting on important concepts around time and relationships between the past, present, and future could create new human pathways toward the future. The spoken words of epic narratives, the intimate accounts of Country transmitted by relatives and elders, and stories inscribed in rock map ancestral histories and provide proofs of sovereignty. They remind us of sustainable ways by which to live on this planet—by fulfilling the reciprocal obligations of caring for Country and valuing its rich webs of kin connectedness.

When Noongar expert Bracknell discusses in chapter 3 how his language and cosmology emphasize the links rather than the divisions between past, present, and future, he offers a recipe for change. For engaging with “language and song revitalization on Country is likely to further empower the explanation of these kinds of esoteric understandings in their own terms, without losing so much in translation.” Especially so when “understandings of the deep past can be enhanced via greater engagement with and investment in Aboriginal communities, languages, and performance traditions.”

Through the languages of story, music, song, photography, and art, this collection demonstrates both the unique and the in-common temporalities that underpin Indigenous modes of practice. Its contributors imply fresh directions for moving beyond history’s conventional framings of time, including the artificial divisions between the “pre,” the ancient, and the modern. All scholarly work involves translation across linguistic and conceptual boundaries and across time and space. In the future, more scholars will be reclaiming and learning Indigenous languages, at least adequately enough to conduct a Welcome or an Acknowledgment of Country.

Only when global deep history is informed by Indigenous historicities will it reach its full potential. Whether on the high snowy Country, in the tropics, in deserts, or in temperate zones, those who commence future research journeys will be walking in the footprints of their deep-time

predecessors. We cannot do any of this research work without the guidance of elders and the multiple Indigenous temporalities that span great epochs. We are honored to be welcomed by them, to be permitted to walk in their ancestral footsteps and to speak out loud the words of their languages.

NOTES

1. Ngunnawal can also be spelled “Ngoonawal” or “Ngunawal.” We always capitalize Country out of respect, as it means the area of land and waters that is our own.
2. Rediscovering the Deep Human Past: Global Networks, Future Opportunities is a Laureate project funded by the Australian Research Council (FL170100121).
3. Rademaker, *Found in Translation*.
4. This term is discussed in more detail in Rose et al., *Country of the Heart*; Sutton, *Country*.
5. Allbrook and McGrath, “Collaborative Histories.”
6. An Acknowledgment of their sovereignty by others, such as the chair of an event, is an alternative practice, usually carried out for less significant events or if an elder or representative is unavailable. See McKenna, “Tokenism or Belated Recognition?”
7. Matilda House, personal communication with author, November 2019.
8. Many Indigenous Australians prefer the word “custodian,” eschewing the property-oriented word “owner” because, as they often say, the land owns them; their land-linked responsibilities are far more complex than this binary, but they are part of a long historical line and are simply the ones currently caring for this land. Given the politics of acquisitive colonialism, many people preferred to be recognized as the rightful owners. Words in translation inevitably shift and skew meanings, but reflecting on congruence and dissonance can be enlightening and lead to new ways of framing questions and approaches.
9. See, for example, Evans, *Dying Words*.
10. Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands*; see also McNeil, “Doctrine of Discovery Reconsidered.” For a valuable work on the idea of discovery, see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.
11. “Secret Instructions to Captain Cook, 30 June 1768,” Documenting a Democracy, Museum of Australian Democracy, https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/nsw1_doc_1768.pdf; Thomas, *Discoveries*.
12. An Indigenous elder of the Country on which an event is taking place will be nominated to perform the Welcome Ceremony or may be represented by a younger person. However, if it is not suitable for an elder to open an event or if an elder is unavailable, an Acknowledgment by one of the organizers has become

- an alternative protocol. The wording usually entails “an acknowledgement of elders past, present and emerging,” now obligatory in university and corporate settings. Here a non-Indigenous person basically recognizes the human history that took place on the land before takeover by the entity currently “owning” that piece of land. It constitutes an acknowledgment of Indigenous sovereignty and of their long history. See McKenna, “Tokenism or Belated Recognition?”
13. The term everywhen was coined in Australia by anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner to refer to Aboriginal temporalities, also known as the Dreaming.
 14. For a key study of place and temporality, see Ingold, “Temporality of the Landscape.”
 15. Souvatzi, Baysal, and Baysal, *Time and History*; Smail and Shyrock, “History and the ‘Pre’”; Mrozowski and Schmidt, *Death of Prehistory*.
 16. Ogle, *Global Transformation of Time*.
 17. For example, Lucas, “Time and Archaeological Event.”
 18. Nabokov, *Forest of Time*, 2.
 19. Te Punga Somerville, “Inside Us the Unborn,” 70–71; Ballard, “Oceanic Historicities.”
 20. McGrath, “Monumental Discovery Narratives”; see also O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*.
 21. McGrath, “Critiquing the Discovery Narrative.”
 22. See, for example, Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 172. For a detailed survey of associated themes, see McGrath and Russell, *Routledge Companion*.
 23. For example, Patrick Geary of the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, has been working on sixth-century DNA. Amorim et al., “Understanding 6th-Century Barbarian.”
 24. Smail and Shyrock, “History and the ‘Pre.’”
 25. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*.
 26. See Aslanian et al., “AHR Conversation.”
 27. The former term is elaborated in Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*. For historicities see Nabokov, *Forest of Time*; Ohnuki-Tierney, *Culture through Time*; Stewart, “Historicity and Anthropology.”
 28. See Souvatzi, Baysal, and Baysal, *Time and History*; see also Allen, “Past in the Present.”
 29. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*.
 30. Wailoo, Nelson, and Lee, *Genetics and the Unsettled Past*.
 31. Shyrock and Smail, *Deep History*; Guldi and Armitage, *History Manifesto*. The latter publication attracted lively debate, including Cohen and Mandler, “*History Manifesto*”; Christian, *Maps of Time*; Smail and Shyrock, “History and the ‘Pre.’”
 32. Aslanian et al., “AHR Conversation.”
 33. Stanner, “Durmugam,” 70.

34. Saunt, "Telling Stories"; Hokari, *Gurindji Journey*.
35. Stanner, "The Dreaming," 24.
36. Wolfe, "On Being Woken Up"; Morphy, "Encoding the Dreaming."
37. Alicia Nally, "Indigenous Leader Welcomes Important Change to National Anthem Which PM Says Reflects the Australia 'We Always Hope to Be,'" *ABC News*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-01/what-leaders-say-about-change-to-national-anthem-words/13026006>.
38. *Belonging: Stories of Australian Art*, National Gallery of Australia, Parkes ACT, December 6, 2019–August 1, 2021, <https://nga.gov.au/exhibitions/belonging/>. This exhibition combined Indigenous and non-Indigenous artistic traditions; notably, its team included leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous curators.
39. *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia*, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge MA, February 5–September 18, 2016, <https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/exhibitions/4983/everywhen-the-eternal-present-in-indigenous-art-from-australia>.
40. In using the term "biographies," we note that Indigenous ideas of the self diverge from Western views of self. For a detailed discussion about the Pintupi idea of the self, see Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*.
41. Laughren, Hale, and Warlpiri Lexicography Group, *Warlpiri-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary*.
42. Marmion, Obata, and Troy, *Community, Identity, Wellbeing*, xii, 15–16.
43. See James, "Tjukurrpa Time"; Allbrook and McGrath, "Collaborative Histories." For a review of terminology, see Jones, "Beyond Songlines"; Neale and Kelly, *Songlines*.
44. Gay'Wu Group of Women, *Song Spirals*, xv.
45. "Uluru Statement from the Heart," May 2017, https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.pdf; see also Davis, "Long Road to Uluru"; Reid, "2020."
46. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, September 13, 2007, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>; see also O'Sullivan, *We Are All Here to Stay*.
47. For Australian examples related to climate change, see Nunn and Reid, "Aboriginal Memories of Inundation"; see also Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 11.
48. Nabokov, *Forest of Time*; Fixico, *Call for Change*.
49. Paton, "Mutability of Time and Space."
50. Some genomics experts are attempting to match their research with linguistic insights. See, for example, Greenhill, Heggarty, and Gray, "Bayesian Phylolinguistics." However, contributors to our volume did not embrace this approach.
51. Shoemaker, "2019 Presidential Address."

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PART 1

Songs of Country in Time

CHAPTER 1

Standing on the Ground and Writing on the Sky

An Indigenous Exploration of Place, Time, and Histories

Jakelin Troy

I am a member of the Ngyamitjimitung clan of the Ngarigu people of the Snowy Mountains, the alpine Country of New South Wales in south-eastern Australia also known as the Monaro district. I grew up in an era when pale-skinned Aboriginal people like me were called “half-castes,” somehow not a whole Aboriginal person. But I never left my Country, as we call our territories, and I was always a whole person in that snowy place. We are the “ice mob,” people of a frozen landscape.¹ When I was a young scholar at the University of Sydney, I was drawn to the idea that I would pursue a PhD at the Australian National University, not only because it is a wonderful university but also because it sits almost within my Country. Even though it is on Ngunawal land, it lies at the end of the slopes of my mountains. And I grew up going back and forth to the Snowy Mountains—my Country all my life.

Over the past years I have been exploring how understanding “Country”—in the sense that we use the term to indicate both attachment and sovereignty, through language and cultural revival—can build a path back to the deep past for Aboriginal communities such as my own Ngarigu people. I do this through drawing together oral history, archaeological data, and the documentary history created by and about our peoples. Adnan Bhatti, a friend and colleague at the University of Sydney, has been a “muse” for my thinking. He is Indigenous too:

Saraiki from Multan in the Punjab in Pakistan. His Country is very flat, and he had never seen snow until he came to my mountains one winter. It was an overwhelming sensory and emotional experience for him. He told me that in Ngarigu Country, “it feels like I am writing my experiences on the sky and that the sky is listening,” observing that the Ngarigu literally touch the sky at the top of our mountains. We are people who are “standing on the ground and writing on the sky.” Ngarigu people are also known as the “moth hunters” for the great feasts we hosted in our Country each summer, where the main item on the menu was the bogong moth, which swarmed in rocky crevices. The moths were toasted on hot coals and eaten hot or made into cakes to eat throughout the day.

My grandmother taught me, and my mother still maintains, that every person in our lives continues beyond death as a star returned to the sky. As we stand in our mountain Country we reach up to our ancestors to share our new stories and consider our past. This belief in a connection between the earth and the sky, understanding them as one continuum, is common for many Indigenous communities worldwide. We do not see ourselves as being in a solely terrestrial space. Land, water, and sky all connect as one space, and the stories of ancestral figures and the creation of features on the land, in the water, and in the sky are all interconnected. In Australia the great epic of the Seven Sisters connects Aboriginal communities across the continent as it weaves across the land, through rivers to the ocean, and up into the Milky Way in the heavens.

There is archaeological evidence that my people have been in the Snowy Mountains (commonly called the Snowies or High Country) at least since the Pleistocene Epoch, about 11,700 years ago—that is, since the last Ice Age, as it is colloquially known. We knew how to survive in ice and snow, and we still do. Most people of my community still live in and around the Snowy Mountains of southeastern Australia. Many are in Canberra or the smaller Country towns of Cooma, Tumbarumba, and others in the Monaro district. My community currently consists of fewer than one thousand people and is made up of numerous families from different clan groups from the Snowies. Originally, we had only about forty people per clan group.

We are beginning to make our way back to our identity as the Aboriginal people of the Snowies through a process of gathering our shared oral histories. We are not the same as we were in 1788, when the British invaded, but we are still passionately interested in and drawn, like our moths, to our Country. We are finding that our stories have remarkable synergies, even though many of us did not grow up together. We are combining this personal, shared understanding of who we are as a people with great efforts to collect historical information and to understand the archaeological record of our peoples.

Little archaeological work has been done in our Country, although rich sites are all over the Monaro region. Archaeologist Josephine Flood was the most active researcher in our Country. She provided population estimates and information about lifestyles and cultural practices that are remarkably similar to the current experiences of my community.² According to both the archaeological record and our present experiences, we have always been and continue to be people who spend a lot of time up in the snow in the mountains, living in small, clannish family groups. We are in hot dispute all the time about everything (although I think that must be typical of Aboriginal people everywhere). We have known and know how to live and survive in the bush and have adapted our lifestyles to rural living. Most of us raise cattle and value the skills associated with that industry, particularly the ability to ride horses bred up in that Country across some of the most difficult terrain anyone could attempt to negotiate.

This inspired the story of the “man from Snowy River” who chased brumbies, as we call wild horses in Australia, on his own small mountain horse, at breakneck speed through the High Country. This story, now so iconic and loved by all Australians, is a story of my people, who continue to value stories of reckless bravery and survival in the mountains. As you read the following quote from Australian poet Banjo Paterson’s famous 1890 poem, *The Man from Snowy River*, I ask you to imagine yourself watching an Aboriginal stockman, because the man almost surely was Ngarigu. A group of expert mountain horsemen set out on their seasoned mounts to capture an escaped valuable thoroughbred racehorse colt that was living with the brumbies. They chased the racehorse and the

brumbies until the animal galloped straight down what looked to be an impassable cliff. All but one fearless young mountain man drew rein, dreading the treacherous slope:

When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull,
It well might make the boldest hold their breath,
The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full
Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.
But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,
And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,
While the others stood and watched in very fear.³

Our people continue to thrive up in these rugged mountains. My mother says she cannot understand people getting lost or injuring themselves in our Country; we ride it, walk it, ski it, sleep in it, and live in it, whereas many other people lose their lives in it. We have known it for tens of thousands of years, and our knowledge of this Country and being safe in it persists in our Ngarigu community.

Ngarigu cultural life is renewing, and we are also renewing the use of our language, which has not been used for everyday communication in the Snowies for generations. We are joining so many other Indigenous communities worldwide in this effort to renew language and culture after the suppression of their cultures and languages as a direct result of colonial oppression following the invasion of their lands by foreign powers. This is often described as a process that is like waking up a 'sleeping' language.⁴ As the lead writer of the Australian Curriculum Languages–Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages, I hope that in the future I will be able to develop a school curriculum to teach my own language.⁵ Across the Ngarigu community there is great excitement about renewing the use of our language. Soon it will be common to hear us once again speaking the language of the Australian Alps, the Snowy Mountains language or Ngarigu, as it is to my people.

I have been working with musicologist Linda Barwick to recover a song of the Monaro sung by women of my people and accompanied by men on percussion, as witnessed by John Lhotsky on his expedition from

Sydney to the Australian Alps in 1834.⁶ We found the exact place he sat listening during a corroboree (a gathering where Aboriginal people sing, dance, feast, and generally socialize), under the light of a full moon in late March, just before the onset of the first frosts of the year. It seems to be a snow increase ceremony song, a song to Country asking it to do what it should at that time of the year—bring the midyear snow. Without the snow the Country does not have the meltwater later in the year that it needs to nourish its unique alpine environment. Ngarigu Country was listed by UNESCO in 1977 as Kosciuszko Biosphere Reserve, Australia, a place to “promote solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use.”⁷ This is how we as Aboriginal people interact with our Country. The women were singing a song that invoked *gaba* (the moon) to bring *ku* (snow) to *kunama namadgi* (the mountains). This song lingers with all who hear it performed.

Lhotsky was so enchanted by the song that on his return to Sydney he transcribed and embellished its music with the assistance of “musical gentlemen” of his acquaintance. He wrote the lyrics as he recalled them and published the work as the first Australian sheet music, “Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe.”⁸ I have sung this song on the same spot in my Country where Lhotsky saw it performed so long ago, with my daughter and cousin Peter Waples-Crowe, all of us Ngarigu, as well as with other members of my community over Zoom during the pandemic lockdown of late 2021. We have all found that it stays with us, invoking us to call the snow. Linda Barwick and other non-Indigenous researchers and students of music at the University of Sydney have sung this song and had the same experience of its lingering melody. Most remarkably, after our performance at Dalgety, near the bend in the river where that full moon heard the call for snow in 1834, it began to snow in the mountains, and throughout the winter of 2021 and beyond it did not stop. It was the best season in many decades, with beautiful deep powdery snow. The snow and cold reached well beyond our mountains along the Great Dividing Range to the Blue Mountains behind Sydney. The song became legend again, and many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people unquestioningly attributed the cold to the song.

This leads me to describe a new technique for research and writing that I am exploring, the practice of doing “emotional history.” I have been inspired, and indeed been given courage, through my engagement with the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions to begin to explore my personal emotional experience of researching Indigenous history. This is no small statement. It is confronting to face my own emotional response to what is often a very traumatizing experience, reliving the history of the invasion and effectively near destruction of my own people. I have studiously avoided doing intensive research about or with my own people; it is too painful.

But this pain also comes from having to face my own culpability in what I admit is insufficient engagement with my own past. I default to my mother’s knowledge and understanding of family and Country. Unrealistically, I expect her to always be there to explain and recite everything from genealogies to family experiences of Country and each other. I get lost in the maze of intricate family relationships, names, dates, places, and experiences. But now that I have a daughter to whom my mother is passing knowledge, I feel a growing urgency to share in this knowledge and gain a real understanding of how the Country owns us and draws us in.

I am inspired by the notion of emotional history and new methodologies that might help me develop my thinking about Indigenous approaches to research as something qualitatively different from what is usual in the academies. By emotional history I mean engaging as a researcher with historical information to gain a more sensorial experience of history—to feel or sense the moment and understand complexities that less emotional engagements miss. Yawuru historian Shino Konishi encourages us, as Aboriginal scholars, to engage with emotional history. She suggests that rather than attempting purely empirical emotionless histories, which have often characterized Indigenous histories of Australia, we should allow ourselves to be moved by what we discover in our research.⁹ Reclaiming the snow song of the women of the Monaro from the archives has been that kind of emotional experience of research that I am now exploring and enjoying with my family and my Ngarigu community.

In my research seeking information about languages and communication in Australia from the beginning of the British invasion in 1788 to the early twentieth century, I have traversed much of the documentary history of this Country. It has been emotional. I have read about experiences of Aboriginal people that are so horrific the accounts left me traumatized. I have also read about human interactions that showed great depth of empathy and caring. Being Indigenous and writing about being Indigenous, no matter what discipline is the vehicle, be it history, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, science, visual and performing arts, or health, involves an emotional engagement that is at times unbearable. I have been involved in many events for the Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions that included or were focused on Indigenous histories and emotion. At each event there has been an outpouring of emotion—sometimes quiet, sometimes angry, sometimes uplifting of the spirit, but always affecting—because we are engaging as Indigenous scholars about histories and futures that matter to us. It is history that is personal.

Ann McGrath has felt this moment of emotional deep history while researching on Country with Mutti Mutti Elder Mary Pappin, walking the Country along

the dried-up salt lake called Lake Mungo in western New South Wales. She is walking over the remains of her ancestors and the remnants they left of their everyday activities. She talks about one of these people, Lady Mungo, as if she were an old aunty who died just yesterday. Lady Mungo lived here when the Neanderthals were hunting game in Europe. Walking this country, the historian can talk to Mary Pappin, and see the relics of the campfires that cooked freshwater mussels before the last Ice Age. History, modern and ancient, lies all around.¹⁰

Nishnaabekwe scholar Leanne Simpson writes of her people in Ontario, Canada, going through “recreation and resurgence” as the people of their territories. Like the Ngarigu, the Nishnaabeg are engaging with their deep past connections to Country, using performances of music and dance to assert their nation’s ongoing presence. In *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, Simpson writes “stories from within,” which is how I see

my own writing developing, sharing the personal insider stories connecting our Indigenous past with our present and our future. She begins the book with a story describing a performance, a public expression of Nishnaabeg culture:

On June 21, 2009, a community procession of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg dancers, artists, singers, drummers, community leaders, Elders, families and children walked down the main street of Nogojiwanong. With our traditional and contemporary performers gently dancing on the back of our Mikinaag, we wove our way through the city streets, streets where we had all indirectly, or directly, experienced the violence of colonialism, dispossession and desperation at one time or another. Our drummers provided the heartbeat; our singers provided the prayers. Settler-Canadians poked their heads out of office buildings and stared at us from the sidelines. “Indians. What did they want now? What did they want this time?” But that day, we didn’t have any want. We were not seeking recognition or asking for rights. We were not trying to fit into Canada. We were celebrating our nation on our lands in the spirit of joy, exuberance and individual expression.¹¹

Exploring the emotional history of my own people is not an entirely new approach for me in my career as a researcher. Over the past several years I have given interviews about my own engagement with doing linguistic history research that is helping people renew their languages, particularly in southeastern Australia. I have been unable to avoid talking about my own language. People always ask me, “So what do you know about your own language?” “Don’t ask me this,” I find I have to respond. “It’s been such an emotional experience.” When I first spoke in public in my own language, I wept.¹² I was speaking at a major conference on applied linguistics. It was only a few words, but an uncontrollable and visceral response came over me. I did not expect it. When I spoke my language for the first time, it was as if I were invoking my ancestors and at the same time mourning the loss of all that we were and all that we could have been. I had witnessed people having an emotional experience as I assisted them in renewing the practice of using their languages and



F1 and F2. Lara Troy-O'Leary and Jakelin Troy at Berghütte, Thredbo, and with their skis on the slopes. Photographs courtesy Jakelin Troy, July 2018.

heard many others speak about such experiences, but I did not expect to have that same response. I am now determined to engage actively with my own histories, language, culture, and most of all, Country.

Indulge me now as I play with your emotions and take you up to the High Country, to my Country, and tell you a story about my family and what history has said about us. My clan, the Ngyamitji, is a very small group that has shrunk from maybe forty people to only a handful. Our land was stolen and introduced disease almost destroyed us. We never had large groups of people in the High Country. Even the archaeological record explored by Josephine Flood in her seminal work on the moth hunters of the Monaro shows us as small clan groups clustered across the Alps of southeastern Australia.¹³

My daughter and I spend much of each summer walking the High Country in and around Thredbo (fig. 1). She, too, feels that connection. She is still a teenager as I finish this writing. We also ski there most winters (fig. 2), and she has often commented on how natural it feels to be in the frozen landscape, experiencing a connection with our people who were there as the Ice Age moved into the Holocene Epoch. So we are Pleistocene people, and my daughter proved it last winter as she flew down the slopes, gliding effortlessly on her skis and feeling perfectly at home in the snow.

As the school holidays approach, she asks me when we will go back up to Thredbo to our home in the mountains, Berghütte, the place my mother built in 1958 to ensure that we would always have a place in the High Country (figs. 3 and 4). My mother took out the first lease from the first developers of Thredbo in 1957, and she and a group of friends who were also skiers formed a club and built a small lodge called Berghütte Mountain Hut, given a German name to fit with the European ski village atmosphere. For the others in the club it was simply a comfortable place to stay when skiing. But for my mother it was a piece of her Country. She is the one who first told me that at the top of the mountains you can reach up and touch the sky. We always do that. We lie on our backs in the summer and paw the air; it's amazing. Our ancestors are up there as stars. My grandmother is a star. When I was a child, she told me that when she was gone, I would find her in the sky.



F3 and F4. Berghütte Ski Club, Thredbo, and view of mountains and snow gums at Thredbo. Photographs by Jakelin Troy, 2018 and 2020.

As I shared my thoughts about this chapter with my mother, she reminded me that earth, the land, and sky meet up there in the mountains. They connect us with our people forever. I had the same feeling when staying with my Torwali friends of the Swat Valley in the high Country of Northern Pakistan, the Hindu Kush, and again in Chile with my Mapuche friends on the edge of the Andes. High Country is good Country, we all say. It is clear there is a deep emotional connection to Country that cannot be broken and seems to connect Indigenous people worldwide. Our countries reach up and touch each other, and our histories are emotionally connected through invasion, resistance, strength, and survival. We have been hunted, but we fought back and we remain.

The Ngarigu loved, lived, and died in the High Country over tens of thousands of years. The archaeological record in Australia has now been pushed back to at least sixty-five thousand years.¹⁴ Some years ago, a gravesite was unearthed after a flood in the High Country. This ancient site and its grave goods are evidence of people who cared for each other in my Country over many millennia.¹⁵ The Ngarigu burial site is estimated to be about seven thousand years old. Archaeologist Sue Feary, who did the work on the site, found two people who had been buried together, a young man in his late teens and a woman probably in her thirties. The man's skeleton suggested he had a mild form of spina bifida, but not so severe as to have affected his mobility or caused his death. We do not know how they died or why they were buried together.

The pair was buried with an elaborate necklace of 327 pierced kangaroo and wallaby incisor teeth. Each pair of teeth was from one animal, and this necklace represented at least 126 animals. Perhaps it was made in a single event. More likely, though, it was constructed over generations, each adding more teeth. Either way, it was intricately and lovingly made. It showed a lot of wear, and the sides of the teeth were polished, evidence of its use as a necklace. It had been worn, loved, and cared for, and at last it was put to rest with its wearer.¹⁶ Remnants of pollen were found in the burial site, suggesting there had been flowers too. The site also had bones used for sewing skins together, a scraper for fleshing skins, hammer stones, and small grindstones, perhaps for ocher, as a small quantity of red ocher was found, or perhaps for grinding plants into

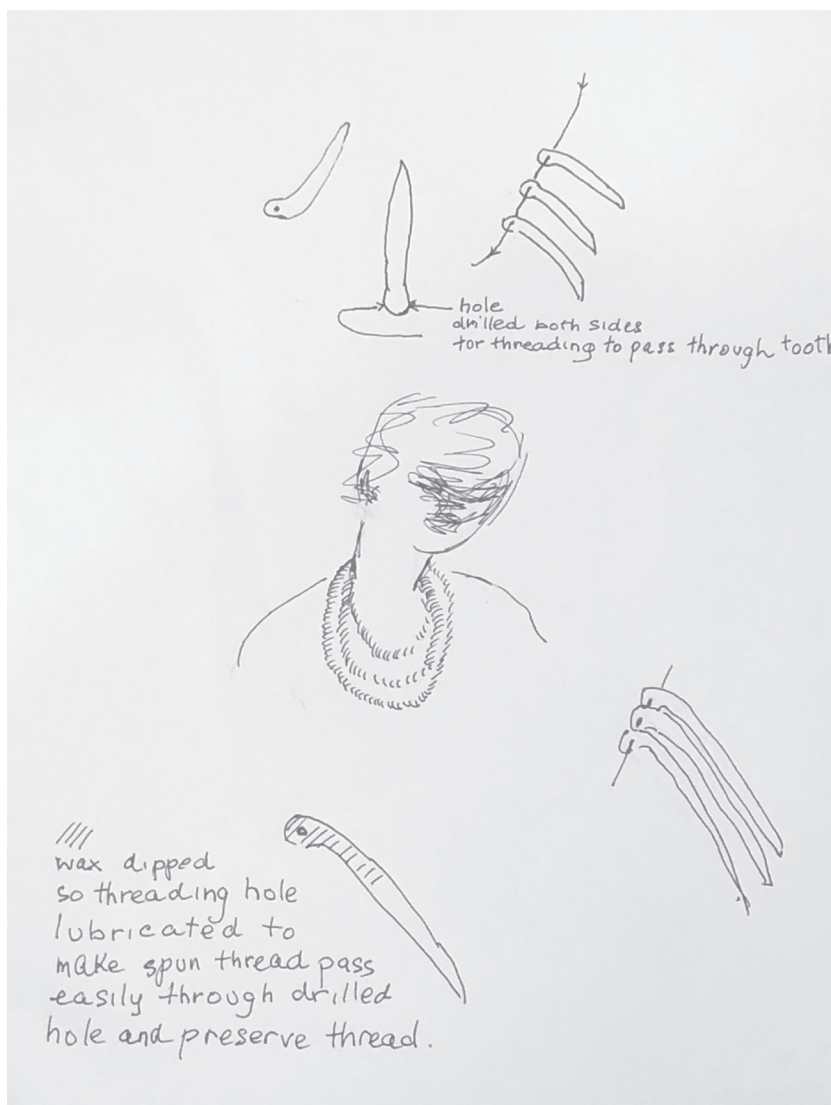
foods. These were all precious objects that were essential and useful to people. I suspect the man and woman buried here were very important to have had such grave goods included in the ceremony of parting.

My mother, Shirley Troy, and I discussed the archaeological report of this burial, and my observations come from our discussions. My mother undertook her graduate studies in visual arts at the University of Guanajuato, Mexico, and has specialized in the study of Indigenous art making worldwide, using her own practice as a National Art School trained artist and as an ethnographer. She found this necklace intriguing and agreed to analyze and draw it for me for use in this chapter (figs. 5 and 6). She observed that the necklace might have taken years to create, with teeth added gradually, as each pair came from an animal that was probably hunted only one per month. As 126 animals were suggested by the archaeological report, this would have meant 126 months just to collect so many teeth. She speculated the teeth may also have been collected as trade goods. The necklace is a message through time of the connection among people, trade, sharing, and deep caring. Her images of the necklace are included not only as illustrations of the object but also as her way of sharing her own deep interest in our ancient past and continuing connection of our people to our Country. For both of us the experience of talking about these people from our “everywhen” connected their story, their lives, and their attachment to Country and community with ours. It felt as though we were part of the making of the necklace and had experienced that final moment of its life in our community when it was placed with these two Ngarigu people as the community laid them to rest, before they returned to the sky as stars according to our beliefs.

This ancient burial site of a man and a woman interred together reveals a community expressing its love and care thousands of years ago. Despite this love and care, going back to time immemorial, many of the early colonial accounts of my people are vitriolic and describe us as primitive and violent. One account tells how a queen of the Monaro preferred to suckle a dingo puppy and “dashed out the brains” of her own child because it was an inconvenience.¹⁷ John Lhotsky, who documented our snow song, describes us in his account of his travels through our Country



F5. Reconstruction of the stringing pattern of the necklace, drawn by Shirley Troy, after a photograph in Feary, "Aboriginal Burial," captioned, "Figure 1. Cooma burial site: Kangaroo teeth arranged to form a necklace. (Photo: National Parks and Wildlife Service.)"



F6. Notes on the manufacture and mode of wearing of the necklace, analyzed and drawn by Shirley Troy.

in 1834 as “already very weak” and “not civilised but corrupted.”¹⁸ Our own accounts are more poignant. Lhotsky provided an epigraph in his publication of our song, a lament from my people:

Unprotected race of people,
unprotected all we are;
And our children shrink so fastly,
Unprotected why are we?¹⁹

In colonial Australia we were generally despised, only occasionally mitigated by pity. We were never admired. Aboriginal people in Australia are still regarded as problematic for our governments, the subjects of inquiries and policy-making that often make no sense on the ground. Tess Lea writes of the making of “wild policy” for the “wild” Indigenous people of Australia.²⁰ She is right. There is a continuing disconnect between us as the deep-time traditional custodians of our Countries, the “wild” people, and the vast bulk of the rest of the population. Most Australians are still unsure about how to engage with us in their everyday lives. In my research I meet with Indigenous people from all over the world, and everywhere we are feared, mistrusted, and considered dangerous. I commented in a public opinion piece several years ago that “I work with endangered languages, spoken by endangered people, who live in dangerous circumstances—this is the world of Indigenous people.”²¹ I described my reflections after returning from a worldwide field trip:

In late 2017 I set out from Australia’s endangered Indigenous world and travelled to north Pakistan’s endangered Indigenous people, the Torwali of the Swat Valley. There I met people who are regarded as “dangerous.” I then went to Chile and met with Mapuche Indigenous people of that region who also told me they are called dangerous. On my return to my world, Indigenous Australia, I paused to reflect on that word “endangered” and the word “danger,” for the first time leapt out at me. I realised Indigenous people and danger are synonymous. We live in danger and are seen to be dangerous. Indigenous people live in danger vilified as destabilising forces in our own countries.²²

It is good to be in company that does not hold these views. But it is sadly still common; look how our own former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull has dealt so summarily with our 2017 “Uluru Statement from the Heart,” which asked only for us to have a voice in the governance of our own Country.²³

My mother tells me, “When you go up the mountains you’ve got to talk to the crows,” in addition to talking to various rocky outcrops and greeting them. She always told my daughter, “When you get off the lift at the top near the eagle’s nest, you’ve got to go and speak to this group of rocks.” She had never said anything like that until quite recently to my daughter, but she was adamant about this. The crow moiety—that is, the people whose Country was up at the top of the mountain—has disappeared today. But there are crows (*yukumbrak*) everywhere, and they talk to you all the time. They ride the ski lifts up and down. At the top of the Alps were people who belonged to the crow moiety, and now those people are only crows.

Australian archaeologist John Mulvaney wrote in 1991 that “Pleistocene occupation may be presumed to have occurred on the mountains and particularly in presently forested valleys.”²⁴ Current archaeological wisdom limits Pleistocene sites to lower altitudes. The oldest dated places relevant to the region are at Cloggs Cave, Victoria; Birrigai in the Australian Capital Territory; and Burrill Lake on coastal New South Wales. Places of comparable or even greater antiquity may be anticipated at higher altitude. Unfortunately, little archaeology is being done in the Monaro today. Instead, in the heart of my Country, Lobs Hole and Ravine are being blasted as part of the development of the Snowy 2.0 Hydro-electric Scheme. Our treasured sites are endangered and unprotected, just as my people have been.

The history of my people is supremely affecting, but what is uplifting and should be inspiring for all people is that we continue and, like so many groups of Aboriginal people across Australia, we are rebuilding ourselves—recovering and awakening our languages and cultural practices. We are writing our new history on the sky, and it is a better one. One in which all Australians can share, as Aboriginal sovereignty in our own Countries is beginning to get a stronger and more public voice.

NOTES

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use the term “mob” to describe people of a particular social group or belonging to a particular Country. A specific mob can have its own group or language name and can be described by its characteristics. So Ngarigu are “ice mob,” the people on the coast are “saltwater mob,” and those who live inland are the “freshwater mob” and “desert mob.”
2. Flood, *Moth Hunters*.
3. Paterson, *Man from Snowy River*.
4. Hinton, “Sleeping Languages.”
5. See Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/>.
6. Troy and Barwick, “Claiming the ‘Song’”; Lhotsky, *Journey from Sydney*.
7. UNESCO, “Kosciuszko Biosphere Reserve, Australia.”
8. Lhotsky, *Song of the Women*.
9. Konishi, “Reconstructing Aboriginal Emotional Worlds.”
10. Curthoys and McGrath, *How to Write History*, 1.
11. Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*, 11.
12. Troy, “First Time I Spoke.”
13. Flood, *Moth Hunters*, 46.
14. Florin et al., “First Australian Plant Foods.”
15. Feary, “Aboriginal Burial.”
16. Feary, “Aboriginal Burial.”
17. Kabaila, *High Country Footprints*.
18. Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, 26.
19. Ngarigu “Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe,” in Skinner and Wafer, “Checklist of Colonial Era Musical Transcriptions,” 387–88.
20. Lea, *Wild Policy*.
21. Troy, “We Are Seen to Be Dangerous.”
22. Troy, “We Are Seen to Be Dangerous.”
23. Wahlquist, “Turnbull’s Uluru Statement Rejection”; “Uluru Statement from the Heart,” May 2017, https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.pdf.
24. Mulvaney, “Alpine Cultural Heritage.”

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CHAPTER 2

Bugarrigarra Nyurdany, Because of the Dreaming

A Discussion of Time and Place in Yawuru Cosmology

*Sarah Yu with Yawuru Community Members Dianne
Appleby, Lloyd Pigram, and Thomas Edgar*

We acknowledge our elders, past and present, who have generously shared their story and knowledge with us.

The chapter is written in the first person, presenting the discussion between Sarah (a non-Indigenous cultural worker and researcher) and her Yawuru co-workers and elders at Nyamba Buru Yawuru, Thomas, Dianne, Lloyd, and Naomi. Nyamba Buru Yawuru is the organization of the Yawuru people from the area in and around Broome.

In preparation for our presentation at the Understanding the Deep Past across Language and Culture Symposium, I (Sarah) asked Yawuru's chairperson and Law boss, Thomas Edgar Undabudi (known as Unda), "What does time mean to Yawuru?"¹ We were traveling back to Broome from Fitzroy Crossing, where we had been at a workshop to discuss the repatriation of ancestral remains. We had visited a site in the ranges where the Bunuba elders had recently held a funerary rite for one of their ancestors whose bones had been taken from a burial site and had now been returned. These events had left us with a strong feeling of the passing of time, the traumas of the not-too-recent past, and respect for the time-honored traditions of ensuring the peaceful return of the spirits of ancestors to their Country. Unda replied immediately: "We respect the time. *Bugarrigarra* made this for us, and we carry the Law

for *Bugarrigarra*. It's all from when time began. We follow that. This is our time. There is no *time*; it's a living thing. The invasion happened, but it didn't change this. People must stay with the time, stay with the Law of the Country. It is ongoing and never stops. We don't know what will happen, but we must always follow that."

As we traveled through Bunuba and Nyikina Countries, in the Kimberley region in the north of Western Australia (map 1), our journey was dotted with memories as Unda recalled events that had occurred in his family's life. Although he is from a neighboring group, he is not a stranger to this river Country, where his connections are deep. This was where his father "found" Unda's sister "Judy." Her *rayi* (child spirit) appeared to him and had come from the spring that was close to where he was working in the stock camp. These were the places where his dad had worked on the stations as a stockman. The Country was full of story as Unda relived and remembered these events of the past. The places through which we journeyed were populated by the connections with past events. It was not just about those events but also about our connections to them. It was history unfolding.

In this chapter we explore Unda's statement about the concept of time: what it means, the ways it affects how Yawuru live in Country, and how it affects the work we do. It is a journey of inquiry about what time means to Yawuru people. We are cultural workers at Nyamba Buru Yawuru (the place of Yawuru), the organization of native title holders of the Country around the town of Broome in northwestern Australia. Our work focuses on the maintenance of Yawuru culture, the upholding of Yawuru Law, and the passing on of Yawuru culture to the next generations. We first explore the concept of time as it is expressed mostly in the Yawuru *Ngan-ga* in reference to the cycle of seasons. We then examine at how time is referenced by the Bugarrigarra (the Dreaming), in which the Western distinctions of past, present, and future merge in a world that is viewed as a spiritual, physical, and metaphysical land- and seascape. We next look more deeply at the meaning of *buru*, a Yawuru word that binds time and place together. And finally we consider how these notions of time and place underpin Yawuru people's connection



M1. An Indigenous view of the Kimberley. Created by Nat Raisbeck-Brown of Ecomaps for Nyamba Buru Yawuru.

to and responsibility for their Country in a binding relationship that is expressed as *mabu liyan* (a sense of well-being and good feeling).

NGAN-GA, TIME AND LANGUAGE

In his June 2019 keynote speech to the Lowitja Institute International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference, Peter Yu, a Yawuru man and CEO of Nyamba Buru Yawuru, explained the significance of maintaining language to the well-being of our community:

For all people, language is the expression of a worldview, and of a value system. It contains the signifiers of cultural difference. It plays a crucial role for our people in expressing our social identity, in capturing family relationships, in speaking to connections to places and to country. It is the vehicle by which cultural difference is communicated from parent to child—it is through language that children acquire the ways and world views of their culture . . .

Language is not only a way of *describing* the world. It is in fact a way of *knowing and comprehending* the world, and of understanding oneself, relating to others and reading the natural world. . . . For us in this country, language is the connection between people, the *Bugarrigarra* (Dreaming), well-being and country. . . . Connectivity is part of our identity, of how we think about ourselves as forming part of a constellation of responsibilities to a wider network of kin, and to country.

Back in the office I consulted the Yawuru language workers about translating the word “time.” They confirmed that there is no word for time per se in the Yawuru language, nor are there conceptual markers of periods of time such as day, year, and season, which nevertheless mark the annual cycle of change in the Country. The language includes only the specific names of the different seasons whose sequence reflects a circular changing of time, when aspects of the world interrelate to determine when the changes of season occur. Dianne Appleby, Yawuru cultural coordinator, wrote on one of the interpretive panels in the *Bugarrigarra Nyurdany* exhibition, titled “Cycles of Change,” “Our elders told us about the big seasons of *Laja* (hot time) and *Barrgana* (cold time); about *Man-gala*, the wet time, and *Marul*, the cool season, and about the wind changes: *Wirralburu* (cold, from the south-east) and the *Yaman* (warm, from the west) of *Wiralburu* and *Winmarrara* (the hot wind in *Laja* before the wet). But the seasons are not rigid. They are a part of a continuous cycle of change from *Bugarrigarra* and are a part of our spiritual landscape.”²

Seasonal changes are marked by changes in wind directions and intensity, temperature variations, flowering and fruiting of plants, fattening and reproduction among land and sea animals, salt water clarity, and changes in tides and currents. All these relate to where people should go for hunting and collecting foods and other bush resources. Season time is cyclical, interrelational, and about the sustainability of people’s traditions, of the Country and the resources within, and of the Law that set it all down. However, the markers for seasonal changes are not a given. The interrelationships between elements of Country must be

read and interpreted. Yawuru people pay constant “attention” to the world to understand what is going on at any particular time and how it may relate to other things that have happened or, increasingly in our current climate change dilemma, should have happened.³ The text on the interpretive panel continues, “We are always reading the signs of change, to know what the country is doing. We read the different kinds of clouds, winds and shadows on the land, or the formation of *gujukuju* (willie-willies) as signs and spiritual messages from the country. Like watching the tides, we are always watching and paying attention to the day-to-day changes of our surrounds. We have watched and followed the seasonal cycles for thousands of years, adapting to the changes, keeping our culture and country alive.”

The exhibition aimed to articulate this connection to Country through knowing and following the seasons and to express how the seasonal patterns of life lay at the heart of the survival of Yawuru culture and traditions. Although there has been much loss—of language, traditions, and knowledge—and much trauma, people have continued to follow the age-old patterns of the past. Rooted as they are in Country itself, the patterns of life molded around the cycle of seasonal change have been maintained. They are considered timeless, and following the seasons, living by the seasons, is a way of keeping in touch with and constantly reconnecting with Country and *Bugarrigarra*. It is also the way of keeping family together and reconnecting with our ancestors. Dianne explains, “We follow the seasons; that is how we survived. For us time is cyclical, not linear. Everything has a season. There is *jalangardi* (goanna) time; *walgawalga* (salmon) time. This is how we measure our time.”

I discussed with the Yawuru language team the ways in which different times are represented and how the Yawuru language distinguishes between past, present, and future. The language team explained about the different tenses in the Yawuru language. For example, the present tense in Yawuru doesn’t always mean right now. It means the time around right now, as opposed to before or a long time ago. Although this is not dissimilar to non-Aboriginal cultures and languages, such as English, in Yawuru these time distinctions are not made; rather, there is a continuum between now and before. The past may be conceptualized

in relation to periods of time-place where things have happened and the social-political landscape was different.

For example, “station time” refers to when people lived and worked on the cattle and sheep stations, “common gate time” means when the policies of the day prevented Aboriginal people from coming into town, and “Law time” is when everything stops and people focus on ceremony. These historical periods are markers of change, but the most significant aspect of doing things now is how they fit into the time-honored patterns of seasonal life. The spiritual, cultural connections take precedence over the historical and the secular. Not surprisingly for people who live off the sea, the most common reference was to “fishing time” or the time for getting particular species. “Walgawalga time” is salmon time in Wirralburu or *Barrgana* (the coming of cold weather and the cold season). “Hot time” (*Laja*) is the time for getting shellfish. The seasons are put in place from *Bugarrigarra*, and the historical times are simply interesting things that have happened from time to time—some good, some bad—but they do not in themselves change the status quo of the ever-present connections of Country, *Bugarrigarra*, family, and time.

As my conversations with the language team continued, it became clear that time is not something that stands on its own as an abstract concept. Like most things Yawuru it is *connected* to people and to Country—to what the Country is doing and to what people should be doing or have done in the past. As Dianne further explains, the messages of the seasonal changes are a spiritual conversation between the Country and its people, and it is the responsibility of the people to listen:

The winds bring us warnings, relief, sickness. It brings the change of season—Wirralburu before the cold, *Wirilburu* before the hot, then Winmarrara, the hot, humid wind before the rain comes, bringing anticipation and excitement even though it is hot.

The winds bring language. They can create mabu liyan—you always feel good when the cool winds blow, and the wind brings spiritual messages. It is a conversation between the Country and the people.

The winds bring the clouds, and each tells us a story. There are *ngugngu*, the rain clouds, and *wilany*, the puffy clouds of the *jurru*,

as the wet approaches. They are like *rayi* (spirits) from the Country, from Bugarrigarra. We dream into the seasons, and that's how we get messages about what is going on, and we know what to do.

“Season time” is mostly an expression of the interconnectedness of people and Country. Time and Country are inseparable and have a deep spiritual foundation. They are both of and from *Bugarrigarra*, the Yawuru word for Dreaming—that inadequate translation of a complex, rich, culturally deep term. It is Stanner's “everywhen.”

BUGARRIGARRA NYURDANY

The foundation of Yawuru cultural beliefs and understandings and relationship with Country is *Bugarrigarra*, for which there is no adequate English translation. According to Patrick Dodson, Yawuru elder and a senator for Western Australia:

For the Yawuru people of Broome Western Australia, where I was born, our history begins with Bugarrigarra, what most Westerners romantically call . . . the Dreamtime! The Bugarrigarra encompasses the time well before Western philosophy, religion and laws reached our lands. The Bugarrigarra is associated with events that created our world, deep at the beginning of time, yet it transcends time and space to inform and give meaning to contemporary Yawuru life. For those Yawuru who still hold faith with the customary law, it is the spiritual force that shapes our cultural values and practices, our relationship with our country and the responsibilities and obligations that we have to each other as Yawuru people.⁴

Lloyd Pigram describes what it means to him as a young man: “Bugarrigarra makes us who we are. It is about the interconnectedness of everything. For us, from Bugarrigarra everything has a meaning and a place, and we are connected to it.” As Dalisa Pigram, a Yawuru language teacher and dancer, puts it, “Our country is alive. The spirit within the country dictates the seasons, and we are always moving with the seasons. That's how we follow our dreaming. We are here *Bugarrigarra nyurdany*—because of our Dreaming.”⁵

SPIRIT TIME

So how does *Bugarrigarra* underpin what Yawuru people do and think about and experience time and history? To understand their views we need to accept the spiritual nature of Country and how Yawuru interact with it, acknowledging the presence of spirits in the Country. As an example, Unda, Jimmy, and Lloyd mention the *bulany*, or *jurru*, that live in Country. They are serpentlike beings that get up, move around, and can create havoc in the Country. They reside in particular places, such as offshore near Gantheaume Point, but they can appear out in the back-country as well. As the wet season approaches they are more active, and they can be seen as the cloud formations that herald the rain. They may be benevolent, bringing rain, or they may be aggressive in the form of waterspouts, willie-willies (dust devils), and cyclones. They can also bring fire and have been known to chase people who are out hunting. Yawuru are always mindful of *jurru* and what they might be doing or saying.

Lloyd gives another example of the spiritual nature of Country and how people interact with it: “In many places there are rayi, playful and mischievous spirits of unborn children. In places revisited after long absences, they can be heard singing. When people visit Country to go hunting, the spirits bring them fish and other bush resources. They both welcome and discourage people and can be responsible for mishaps. They visit in dreams, sometimes powerfully enough to cause *yaman* (a state of being where one is unable to move). Visitors to our Country, if they are open to them, may also interact with spirits.”

He further explains that other, deeper, more powerful spiritual forces lie within the Country, residing in special sites and forming the songlines and stories that cross the vast Australian landscape. More than narratives to be recognized and celebrated, these are ever-present phenomena that keep Country alive, to which people are connected as kin, and that must be respected. As Countrymen, Yawuru people are constantly navigating through this all-encompassing nonsecular, spiritual, and evolving landscape. The presence of these forces demands patient respect and constant negotiation between Yawuru and Country to ensure the well-being of the people and the place.

I am reminded that *Bugarrigarra* beings also put the language in the Country, and Lloyd says that even *buru*, the Yawuru word for Country, encompasses dimensions of both space and time, as well as people's places in them. He reminds me of Kōmei Hosokawa's linguistic documentation of the Yawuru language, in which a section is titled "The Notion of *Buru* 'Time/Space'": "The word *buru* appears frequently in combination with time adverbs. From Yawuru people's point of view, this is the most important single word in the language; it basically means 'time and/or space' and may refer to a variety of entities such as country, land, ground, camp site, earth, dirt, mud, time, era, cemetery in town, death (in association with burial), this world and the other world."⁶

As you look through Hosokawa's manuscript, the meanings of *buru* expand into a notion of totality of Yawuru Country, history, and sense of place. *Buru* can refer to "season time," such as *Wirralburu* (the season for the winds from the southeast); "all time," or *nyangadyunu-gun buru*, in which "*gun*" also references place, suggesting that things are always forever in place/in Country; and "still time" *buru-bardu* (still meaning yet, as in something that continues from past to present to future, or ever-present). Variations can also refer to the *place* where things are found, such as bush resources, but can also refer to the place where skills are found; for example, *dyalangardi-dyinaburu* is a good goanna hunter, and *nurlu-dyinaburu* is a good songman. Or it can reference something that is invisible, as in *burulyu*, meaning something that is there but cannot be seen, such as spirits and story.

Buru as time/place/space/spirit/skill is a key to understanding the notion of time in Yawuru ontology, where it is clearly not seen as a separate dimension but is rooted in Country and all that has happened there—both visible and in the spiritual realm—from time immemorial. We begin talking about the idea of time-place as one. Everything is part of the *Bugarrigarra*, and it always continues. Dianne says:

To talk about time, you have to talk about the spiritual and you have to talk about Country. *Buru* is place and time—spirits travel through time; our *rayi* (child spirits) come to us from Country. They connect

the living and the past through Country. Old people visit us in the night, through spirit; they are present when we go on Country. Doesn't matter where you are; you can even be in prison. They visit you. Birds bring us messages, sending good and bad news. You have to be careful. If you do the wrong thing you can get punishment. When we are born it is from *bugarri* time.

Buru also means camp—that is, the place where we live, sit down, have our dinner camp, and get water from our *jila* (permanent waterhole). It also means our home. Country-*buru* is mapped by these particular *buru*, or camps, which are mostly named places that we visit time and again, at the right time of the right season to find water, to get “bush tucker” (the food we hunt or find), to visit our old people, and to fulfill our cultural responsibilities. They leave memory in the landscape in the form of old fires, footprints, discarded shells, and tools.

Every place has stories, old and new, of what happened there, with the divide between the spiritual and secular invisible or even nonexistent. The Yawuru all say that their stories are affirmations of their histories, and telling them in everyday conversation continues to create connection to Country. “This was the place where a daughter’s *rayi* comes from.” “This is the *jila* where the massacre happened.” “This is where we camped.” “This is my mother’s place.” “This is where the *juru* got up and chased me.” Dianne explains, “Every place has memory—visual memory of story, spirit memory, where *rayi* come from and where our ancestors are. Every place has season and its own story. Things rise up from Country, like the clouds, the rain. You have to watch to find out what is happening and to know what you must do.”

TIME AS MABU LIYAN

People are always talking Country and therefore always talking history. When I asked the Yawuru Law bosses about what time means, they said that to understand how we think about time—as *Bugarrigarra*, as place, as story—one should “read the Yawuru Cultural Management Plan. It is all there.”⁷

In 2011 the Yawuru articulated their approach to land and sea management in their own seminal cultural management plan, *Walyjala-jala buru jayida jarringgun buru Nyamba Yawuru Ngan-ga mirli mirli* (Planning for the future: Yawuru cultural management plan, hereafter YCMP). This plan was developed to inform the joint management plans for the Yawuru Conservation Estate. Developed in response to the need to ensure the joint management of the estate, the YCMP expressed the Yawuru people's aspiration of reclaiming their Country, culture, knowledge, and identity. It created a new way to map their Country, which had been subsumed into the geography of a nation-state. It provided the platform for Yawuru to identify their cultural values and to enshrine their agency in protecting and managing those values.

The key to the YCMP is its vision, simply stated as “*Mabu liyan, mabu buru, mabu ngarranguni*” (Good feeling, healthy Country, strong community), expressing that “the guiding principle for good management of Yawuru country is that Yawuru people maintain good, clear *liyan* with the country within the modern, ever changing world.” “*Liyan* is one's inner feelings, emotions, intuition,” Dianne explains. “It is like radar. It tells you when things are good and not good.” It is this inner feeling of *liyan* that connects people to Country and to each other in a binding relationship that requires responsibility—responsibility to know, to remember, to share, to connect with, and to look after. Maintaining *mabu liyan* is the Yawuru way to maintain the world, to achieve balance and harmony.

The way people look after their Country is measured by *liyan*, a sense of well-being with Country. It expresses how people feel about Country and the way it should be managed. It is a simple yet profound statement about how people and Country are linked. Good *liyan* comes from ensuring that Yawuru people have a strong connection to their Country, their ancestors and spirits, their way of life, and their sense of belonging to Yawuru society. It is an expression of emotional strength, dignity, and pride. It also means that it is their responsibility to always maintain a balance between the ever-changing present and the past to ensure the future of Yawuru people, Country, and culture.

To support this vision the YCMP identifies four primary values to underpin all its Country management plans: (1) Yawuru Country is a living cultural landscape, meaning that *Bugarrigarra* is the living foundation of our culture, Country, and Law; (2) Yawuru traditional cultural and ecological knowledge is the foundation of knowing our culture; (3) Yawuru have the right to enjoy Yawuru Country and to maintain their customary practices; and (4) along with this enjoyment comes the responsibility all Yawuru people carry for looking after Yawuru Country and culture.

Together these cultural values are holistic, not fragmented dichotomies such as nature/culture, tangible/intangible, or old/new. They reflect the interconnections among *place* (the environment), *object* (the resources and features of Country), the *people* (those who carry rights in and responsibility for looking after Country and all that it is made of), and *story* (all that has happened and will happen). The cultural values of knowledge of, relationship to, rights associated with, and responsibility for Country are primary values in the groundbreaking joint management plans for the Yawuru Conservation Estate. When the YCMP won the 2012 Australian Institute of Landscape Architects national medal, the judges said:

The published Yawuru Cultural Management Plan expresses past, present and future; it offers discussions about Culture, Country, Community and *liyan* (wellbeing) that transcend other reports of this kind, that record and map values. This Cultural Management Plan will and should respectfully drive conservation plans, land management decisions and design activities in marine and terrestrial areas Australia-wide, such is its generous and visionary approach.

It is more than a conversation, more than a listening and recording, more than walking and seeing the land; it is all of these things, but most importantly, it is none of these, but the land and its people.⁸

NURLU, MAINTAINING YAWURU COUNTRY AND HISTORY

Lloyd begins to explain how these understandings carry responsibility and that it is incumbent on our people to incorporate them into everyday life and into the work at Yawuru: “*Bugarrigarra* has not stopped. It

continues. *Bugarrigarra* represents unique manifestations of the total landscape and its seasonal cycles that transcend time and is central to Yawuru cultural understandings. It represents a world of which people are a part and carry responsibility to ‘look after’ their Country.”

For all Yawuru people it is their cultural responsibility is to “look after” Country and to listen to the spiritual messages that it brings. Yawuru history lies in their Country. Events happen, have happened, and will keep happening, but Country is still there, alive, for all time. By visiting, singing, dancing, hunting, and fishing, these connections are maintained and responsibilities fulfilled.

Japanese historian Minoru Hokari worked closely with the Gurindji people at Wave Hill in the Northern Territory. He was one of the few historians of Aboriginal Australia who endeavored to express an Aboriginal—the Gurindji—view of history. His accounts parallel the Yawuru understanding of history. Hokari reminds us that “history always realises itself in the present, because without human efforts to perform the events and experiences of the past, the past never becomes history.” He explains how the Gurindji elders carry moral responsibility to *maintain* their history as living history, which they do through telling, performing, and maintaining connections with Country, with the past, with place, with ancestors, with spirit, and with Dreamings. He states, “They re-narrate past incidents and experiences in the present, re-enact them, apply their moral, political, spiritual and philosophical analyses and thereby try to learn something from history and communicate that something.” They do not fabricate, but the ways of maintaining history directly influence the shape of the past as it is experienced it in the present. Hokari calls this “moral history,” saying, “The Gurindji people have been a part of moral history because they have been participating in sustaining the world by following the Dreaming, . . . the ‘right way.’”⁹

Maintaining balance and presence in Country—that is, looking after Country in old and new ways—is an ongoing moral obligation. Similarly, Dianne, Unda, and Lloyd say that it is our responsibility to maintain our story, our language, our cultural traditions, and our Country. This is how we express and maintain our history and incorporate the passing of time into the present, so that it is there for always. In the past we

have engraved story on pearl shell or message sticks, and in our *nurlu* we paint our bodies, sing and dance, and share this with other groups. In the family and community we pass on knowledge and history through storytelling that confirms our relationships with each other. The relationality and morality of Indigenous storytelling has been articulated by other Indigenous researchers. Shawn Wilson, an Opaskwayak Cree Indian connected to northern New South Wales, sets out a new paradigm that articulates research as “ceremony,” as part of community relationships rather than about them. Wilson says, “The shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality). The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships. and we must be accountable to those relationships.”¹⁰

In his launch speech for Laura Rademaker’s book *Found in Translation*, Peter Yu explains why the task of maintaining relationships and maintaining language as an embodiment of culture at Nyamba Buru Yawuru is so important: “Staying connected to each other, staying connected to value systems that are under enormous pressure to change, and to country. That is our holy trinity if you like. . . . Losing these languages equates to the destruction of the world’s libraries. . . . It is to human thought and creativity what destroying the Amazon is to biodiversity.”¹¹

How then do we at Yawuru promote and share Yawuru history? We connect to Country in other ways—by singing, dancing, visiting, and talking about place. This is where Yawuru history lies. By reviving our *nurlu* (dance/dancing; song/singing), we are putting the story back in Country, through song and dance, and we reconnect.

Through these shared activities Yawuru are not just telling stories or relating history. Through stories and songs we maintain our relationship to Country. They are not only stories, but they express and are part of Yawuru relationship to Country that demands responsibility and continuance. And these relationships are renewed in many ways, in everyday scenarios or unexpected incidents. Getting fish, finding *rayi* (spirits), having dreams, hearing voices, or even getting flat tires and being blocked from going on a Country trip—all these happenings are seen as living connections among Country, the past, spirits, and people,

and they are signs to heed and reflect on daily. As Lloyd explains, “We sing and dance Country. We sing and dance our history. Things come back to us. Nurlu is coming back now.”

We are also putting the story back into Country, bringing the past into the present, through the work projects at Nyamba Buru Yawuru. The ranger and Country manager programs are getting our young people in touch with Country and preparing them to take on the role of management. The language program is bringing our language alive, as adults learn so that they can teach their children again and so that we can be connected to *Bugarrigarra*. Natalie Dean, a Yawuru woman and one of the first graduates of Nyamba Buru Yawuru’s Walalangga Yawuru Nganga adult language program in 2018, said in her graduation speech, “I have made the best decision of my life in joining this language course. It has changed my life completely, culturally, emotionally and spiritually. I now know my connection to Country through language, I have found my identity, and I have reconnected to my great-grandfather through language. My children learnt Yawuru language before me at their school and it didn’t seem right. So now I am teaching my children and grandchildren to speak Yawuru language. I am so proud to be able to keep my language alive.”

We are keeping our language alive through recording stories and sharing them with our own community and with visitors, as well as through developing experiences such as our self-guided Jetty to Jetty trail and app and the cultural events we organize around it.¹² In 2018 we performed nurlu at Burrugun, one of the Jetty to Jetty sites, where the Bardi boat builders and pearling workers used to live. It was the first time in over fifty years that *nurlu* had been performed there. The occasion brought the local people of the Broome community together to celebrate their history, their Country, and the future in cross-cultural partnership.

We have created exhibitions to tell the Yawuru story, such as *Lustre: Pearling & Australia*, a traveling exhibition that tells the pearling story of the north. We curated this exhibition with the Western Australian Museum, and as of this writing, it has completed its national tour. In 2018 we launched the *Bugarrigarra Nyurdany* exhibition for the Nyamba Buru Yawuru offices and the new Liyan-ngan Nyirrwa Cultural Centre

of Well-Being to share the Yawuru story. In this curatorial work we support our local artists in creating interpretive works that reveal Yawuru stories of Country and family, and in doing so we hope to help reconnect them to Country, history, and family. Every day our Country managers and ranger groups are working on Country and, among other things, watching, learning, and paying attention to change and the unexpected.

WHEN WE DANCE IT RAINS

When the unexpected happens we know that Country speaks to us. We live in a subtropical area with an average annual rainfall of about twelve inches. Some years we can get a deluge, but other years, like 2018, we get only a few inches. The rain mostly falls in Man-gala (the wet season), but in the tropical savanna Country around Broome, we also have *mujungu* (winter rain), which is sporadic and unpredictable. Meteorologists have explanations for why and when it rains, but to Yawuru there are cultural ways of understanding why it rains that go to the heart of relationship with Country. Lloyd says, “In our Country when we dance it rains. Or when we visit Country after a long absence it rains, no matter what time of the year. This rain is always seen as a *good* sign, a sign that the Country is happy and that the spirits and Old People are happy with us and that things are in balance.”

In recent years there have been a number of transformative occasions when people have danced and it has rained. We brought together three cultural groups—Karajarri, Yawuru, and Bardi—to open our *Lustre* exhibition, to celebrate the cultural importance of pearl shell, and to share the story. After the performances at the Maritime Museum in Fremantle and the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, a light drizzle of rain arrived.

Similarly, during Broome’s Shinju Matsuri Festival in September 2018 and one of Broome’s driest years, it rained when these groups danced together at Burrugugun, an almost-forgotten reserve at the bottom of Broome’s Chinatown. Burrugugun, commonly known as Morgan’s Camp, is a major Yawuru jila and was where the first pearlers camped. Many Bardi people from farther north on the Dampier Peninsula came to live and work here in the pearling industry, mostly as skilled boat builders.

Mindful that they were far from their Country, Yawuru elders gave the Bardi a place for their culture and to share *nurlu* together, and Burrugun became a place of dance and song. People from all over town would come down in the evening to listen, but no one had danced *nurlu* there for over fifty years. On the first night, after the performances and storytelling, a light misty rain fell on the audience to complete the evening event.

In 2017, when Yawuru put their boys through Law for the first time in many years, Broome had the biggest wet season in fifty years—only in Broome and not the hinterland. Most recently, when the three groups danced with the Noongar people to welcome home the ancestral remains of thirteen men and women who had died as pearl divers and whose bodies had been sold to German museums, again it rained. As the dancers performed, misty rain arrived toward the end of the performance. According to Lloyd, it was a sign that Yawuru had fulfilled our responsibilities and that the spirits of the ancestors were happy.

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NOTES

1. Thomas Edgar, Dianne Appleby, Lloyd Pigram, and Naomi Appleby are cultural representatives of the Yawuru people, the traditional owners of Broome and surrounding areas. They work at Nyamba Buru Yawuru overseeing and developing cultural programs in language, culture, and social history for Yawuru people and the wider community.
2. Our curatorial team at Nyamba Buru Yawuru launched an exhibition, *Bugarrigarra Nyurdany*, Because of the Dreaming, at the Yawuru Liyan-ngan Nyirrwa Cultural Centre, Broome, in July 2019.
3. Hokari, *Gurindji Journey*.
4. Dodson, “Common Roots, Common Futures.”
5. Interview with Dalisa Pigram for Yawuru’s *Bugarrigarra Nyurdany* exhibition, Nyamba Buru Yawuru offices, Broome, 2017.
6. Hosokawa, “Meanings in Yawuru,” 319–20. Kōmei Hosokawa is a Japanese linguist who wrote a grammar and compiled a dictionary for the Yawuru language.
7. Yawuru RNTBC, *Walyjala-jala buru jayida jarringgun buru*.
8. “2012 AILA WA Medal for Landscape Architecture,” Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA), August 14, 2012, <https://architectureau.com/articles/2012-aila-australian-medal-for-landscape-architecture/>.
9. Hokari, *Gurindji Journey*, 89, 47.

10. Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*.
11. Yu speech, Australian National University, Canberra, October 5, 2018.
12. The Jetty to Jetty app, developed in 2016 by Nyamba Buru Yawuru, is an audio companion to the Jetty to Jetty self-guided walking trail, which passes through Broome's Chinatown and along the foreshore of Roebuck Bay. The app presents multilayered stories at thirteen sites between Streeters Jetty and the site of Broome's Old Jetty.

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CHAPTER 3

Old Dogs and Ice Ages in Noongar Country

Clint Bracknell

This chapter discusses perspectives on the deep past based on analysis of Noongar language, story, and song from the south coast of Western Australia. I was born in Albany, Western Australia, at the dawn of the 1980s with ancestral connection to 300 miles of southern coastline beginning a little east of that place, between Fitzgerald River National Park and Cape Arid National Park. This tract of Country exists within one of the largest Aboriginal cultural blocs in Australia with one mutually intelligible language, known as Noongar (also spelled Nyungar).¹ The Noongar region extends across a large urban and rural area in the southwestern corner of Western Australia, including the capital city of Perth. Over thirty thousand Aboriginal people identify as Noongar, although Australian census data suggests that less than 2 percent speak the Noongar language at home.² Although membership in a specific ethnic group—being Noongar, in this instance—may not necessarily grant privileged knowledge, it has motivated my participation in language revitalization activities and my ensuing research of Noongar song traditions.³

Noongar language and song are critically endangered, but they are vitally important because they “represent the distillation of the thoughts and communication of a people over their entire history.”⁴ Historian Anna Haebich challenges the persistent myth that Aboriginal people in Australia

simply lost their culture, writing that this “suggests a deliberate ignorance and forgetting on the part of settler colonists that validated the many cruelties and injustices of colonisation.”⁵ As the first colonized population in Western Australia Noongar endured the full impact of British invasion and the ensuing consequences of dispossession, dislocation, racism, and poverty.⁶ Occupation and frontier violence in the nineteenth century and policies of assimilation and segregation throughout the twentieth century were detrimental to the maintenance of Noongar knowledge systems.⁷ Largely because of the importance of Noongar language to Noongar identity, members of the Noongar community have worked under extreme pressure to ensure the persistence of language, story, and song.⁸ In recent decades Noongar have drawn on the knowledge of senior people, historical documentation, and archival audio recordings to support processes of cultural revitalization.⁹

Noongar language, song, and story are important in their own right. They enhance social cohesion and identity in the southwest of Western Australia while serving as the wellspring for contemporary Noongar creativity. Historians of the Australian frontier are already engaging with Noongar language, song, and story to learn about the motivations of Noongar people in the past.¹⁰ This chapter demonstrates how language, song, and story might inform understandings of the deeper past, particularly in the area now known as the south coast of Western Australia. It investigates Noongar vocabulary for talking about the past, exploring concepts associated with understandings of Country. In an Aboriginal context the term “Country,” written with an initial capital, signifies land as “nourishing terrain,” alive, multidimensional, and intertwined with local Aboriginal people and culture.¹¹ The idea that performance is integral to understanding uniquely Aboriginal concepts of time is central to this chapter. Drawing on reflections from participating in song revival in the south coast region of Western Australia and a story and song associated with the area now known as Fitzgerald River National Park, it considers Noongar responses to the arrival of canines in the region thousands of years ago and what these responses tell us about Noongar time.

MORE THAN WORDS

Languages such as Noongar, which carries few markers of the incorporation of English or other languages, have “formed over the course of time in the contexts of society and culture” and therefore may be “approached as reflections of social and cultural systems.”¹² We may therefore assume that analysis of vocabulary for discussing temporal constructs can provide deeper culturally specific understandings of the past. Factors complicating such research, however, include the critically endangered state of Noongar language, the absence of a complete grammatical description, and the diverse and sometimes inconsistent orthographies used to record the language. Nevertheless, my analysis of the most comprehensive Noongar word lists compiled between 1801 and the present day reveals a number of common terms associated with the distant past.¹³ These are listed in table 1 in a standardized orthography in order of how frequently they appear in documentation of the language:

Table 1. Noongar terms commonly associated with the deep past

Noongar term	Translation
<i>koora</i>	“Long ago”
<i>nyiding</i>	“Long ago”/“cold”
<i>dema koombar</i>	“Long time ago”/“great ancestors”

Among over fifty examples of vocabulary documentation analyzed as part of my study, only one source lists a term for “when,” *nginder*, indicating that language elicitation sessions rarely involved deep investigation of Noongar temporal constructs.¹⁴ *Koora*, the most widely documented term, is phonetically similar to other recorded vocabulary associated with the past, including *karam* (yesterday, formerly), *kori* (just now, lately, short time since, recently), *kor* (back, again, return), and *kooranap* (place where the dead go). The polysemic term *nyiding*, which also refers to coldness, provides the basis for a compelling story about Noongar knowledge of the deep past. In the early twentieth century Noongar woman Ngilgian referred to *nyiding* as “in the cold time of long ago.”¹⁵ Use of this term “suggests a climatic epoch, probably the ice age, that was a

cosmological turning point” for Noongar.¹⁶ Archaeologists identify the coastal region of Western Australia’s southwest as a “refugia” bioregion preferred by people dealing with climatic instability through the Last Glacial Maximum and Terminal Pleistocene.¹⁷ The concept of *nyiding* demonstrates oral history of this or perhaps other ice ages embedded in Noongar language.¹⁸

Noongar language also assists in sustaining what is known to most non-Aboriginal people as “Dreaming” (an English term oversimplifying a foundational Aboriginal concept that has many connotations and is exceedingly difficult to explain).¹⁹ This concept involves manifestations of ancestral beings as the physical landscape, as the social and ecological order that the ancestors created, and as animals, plants, or natural features such as wind and fire.²⁰ Yawuru politician Patrick Dodson explains, “The English word ‘dreaming’ can be misleading because the concepts which it translates are exceedingly complex and largely unrelated to the English meaning of the word. These concepts are often alternatively described as ‘The Law.’ They are a coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths which govern the whole of life.”²¹ Different Aboriginal languages use a range of complex and often polysemic vocabulary to describe what is reductively termed Dreaming.

The *Warlpiri-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary* says of *jukurrpa*, one term often translated as Dreaming, “The term *jukurrpa* may be applied to individual ancestral beings, or to any manifestation of their power and nature, i.e., knowledge of their travels and activities, rituals, designs, songs, places, ceremonies. This provides the model for human and non-human activity, social behavior, natural development. *Jukurrpa* is not conceived as being located in an historical past but as an eternal process which involves the maintenance of these life-forces, symbolized as men and as other natural species.”²² The Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land use *madayin*, speaking of “the sacred beauty” of creation, and the Ngiyampaa of western New South Wales refer to *thingkaa*, which can also mean meat; these, too, are often reduced to Dreaming in English.²³ In the Noongar context polysemic words including *birt* (track, path, sinew, or energy), *maat* (path, leg, or kinship affiliation), and *kooranap* (place where the dead go) are considered to be connected to the Dreaming concept.²⁴

While these Noongar terms differ from those in other Aboriginal languages, the temporal and spatial concepts they refer to seem relatively consistent with those described elsewhere in Australia. The *birt* signifies a path of energy, a way to go—a law—and a *birdiya* is a person who knows the way, knows the Law embedded in Country. How one fits into systems of Law may be understood in terms of kin relationships, *maat*. According to the ethnographer and journalist Daisy Bates, *koor-anap* refers to “a country beyond the sea” where “all dead natives go.”²⁵ Considered alongside Noongar creation stories based in and around the sea, this concept emphasizes the importance of coastal landscapes in perpetuating Noongar understandings of space and time.²⁶

SONGS AND RHYTHMS

Based on his work on Groote Eylandt, anthropologist David Turner argues that song is more fundamental than story to Anindilyakwa cosmology and that the Dreaming is encountered through song.²⁷ Although a variety of Noongar song genres exist, including traveling songs, love songs, and entertainment songs, Bates observed in the early twentieth century that many Noongar songs “are entirely local and are not sung outside the tribe which composed them.”²⁸ This suggests the presence of distinct local Noongar understandings and practices maintained via song, and as with any oral tradition, “recognizing how different information manifests is necessary to comprehend [their] meanings.”²⁹ Noongar songs recorded and transcribed in the twentieth century refer to a number of ancient features in and above the south coast of Western Australia, including the Pleiades (or Seven Sisters) constellation and Frenchman Peak near Esperance in Western Australia.³⁰ These features embody what religious studies scholar Tony Swain characterizes as “abiding events” underpinning the “rhythms” of existence, cornerstones for eternally relevant stories and songs.³¹ To take the musical metaphor further, we could conceptualize these truths as an underlying pulse and our various diverse actions as rhythmic improvisation in relation to that pulse.³²

The association of song with long-standing and everlasting truths may explain some of the complexities of authorship recorded by colonial observers. The attribution of Aboriginal song creation to ancestral spirits

in the ancient past and in the present via dreams could explain colonial observer George Grey's inability to discern whether lauded Noongar composers were "living, or belonged to ancient times, or . . . [were] merely imaginary beings."³³ In an attempt to account for distinctions in authorship, musicologist Ray Keogh describes three general modes of Aboriginal song composition common to the Kimberley region in the north of Western Australia: topical songs composed by people in the same manner as popular music, ancient songs originating from the Dreaming and handed down through countless generations, and new songs referencing the Dreaming, revealed to people by ancestral spirits associated with the Dreaming.³⁴ Musicologist Linda Barwick similarly distinguishes ancient and new songs within the neighboring Western Desert area of Western Australia, both of which may reference particular sites of significance and totemic affiliations.³⁵ Across Australia these kinds of songs may employ esoteric language, and they may be subject to stringent protocols denoting which individuals have the authority to perform or share particular songs and the layers of information associated with them.³⁶

One of the senior women Bates interviewed at Jerramungup in the early twentieth century, Noongar singer Ngalbaitch, provided a description of a Noongar singer "trying to find" a song that attributes song composition to nonhuman entities: "They seem to hear it coming into their ears and going away again, coming and going until sometimes they lose it and cannot catch it. The jannuk (spirit) will however fetch it back to their ears."³⁷ Even if songs are newly received or created, they often reference and assist in maintaining understandings of everlasting truths or foundational concepts. Another Noongar singer, Ngilgian, describes receiving a new song relevant to ancient local knowledge and stories associated with whales in a dream, "I dreamed I was dancing on the whale's back and balancing myself on one thigh."³⁸ Certain powerful songs are commonly associated with recurring ecological phenomena: drought and rain, wind, or the availability of particular flora and fauna and their use. Consequently, these kinds of songs may be restricted to people responsible for the Country concerned.

Bates collected accounts of Noongar rain songs, as well as charm songs to increase the number of swans and swan eggs at a particular

location. She also wrote of performances taking place when the red gum was in blossom to assist the spawning of salmon and sea mullet.³⁹ In an observation about the dynamic relationship among Noongar, song, and Country at York, Western Australia, Mrs. Edward Millett details a Noongar rainmaking performance at a time of drought in 1865: “A most disturbing and oft-recurring hubbub was kept up all night by the whole company, who beat and stamped upon the ground in unison, producing an amount of noise that was perfectly astounding, their bare feet and the hardness of the soil being taken into consideration. The piece, which probably would have had an indefinite run, was in its third rehearsal, when the police interrupted the performance in mercy to the white people, who had been unable to sleep during the two previous nights. We never again saw that many natives collected together at any one time.”⁴⁰ Senior Noongar woman Hazel Brown witnessed her people singing out to communicate with whales, dolphins, groopers, and salmon at certain times of the year on the southern beaches of Western Australia.⁴¹ These examples emphasize the importance of certain genres of Noongar song as a conduit between concepts of temporality and locality, social cohesion, and local ecosystems.

Writer Bruce Chatwin’s 1987 publication widely popularized the term “songlines,” which refers to a labyrinth of invisible storied, sung, and traversed pathways strewn across Australia, variously known as “Dreaming-tracks,” “Footprints of the Ancestors” or the “Way of the Law.”⁴² As alternatives, musicologist Fiona Magowan uses the terms “song paths” and “song routes.”⁴³ Linguist Michael Walsh identifies the widely varying geographic length of songlines, describing how some can circle around to meet while others can focus on a single landmark.⁴⁴ Focusing less on the *what* and more on the *how*, musicologist Catherine Ellis notes that among the Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia, the “long past is ever present and ties both future and past to the moment when a correct reproduction of a Dreaming performance takes place.”⁴⁵ In chapter 4 of this volume Linda Barwick discusses how performance can contribute to collapsing notions of time. Tanganekald, Meintangk, and Boandik professor Irene Watson observes, “The natural world is still singing even though the greater part of humanity has disconnected

itself from song.”⁴⁶ Even regions where languages are endangered and knowledge of performance traditions is rare, such as the south coast of Western Australia, on-Country cultural revitalization can facilitate this kind of temporal transcendence.

OLD DOGS

In an attempt to resist being “victims of a system that set out to destroy us,” as Aboriginal linguist Jeanie Bell puts it, many Aboriginal communities are undertaking processes of cultural revitalization, working with both senior knowledge holders and archival material.⁴⁷ In 2007 Noongar people belonging to the Wirlomin family clan from the south coast of Western Australia organized as Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories to formalize long-standing efforts to maintain local Noongar culture and work on repatriated archival cultural material with the Noongar community.⁴⁸ In a series of community workshops author Kim Scott worked with Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories members to develop six bilingual illustrated books. One of these publications, *Dwoort Baal Kaat*, is inspired by a creation story told by Noongar man George Nelly to Gerhardt Laves, an American linguist visiting the south coast of Western Australia.⁴⁹ The English translations in the book are partially based on the way George’s son Russell Nelly told the story to schoolchildren as part of a 2012 Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories outreach program. George Nelly’s daughter Helen Hall illustrated the book.

The story of *Dwoort Baal Kaat* takes place in the vicinity of Fitzgerald River National Park and involves a man borrowing his brother’s dogs to go hunting. The dogs efficiently take down various types of game—kangaroo, wallaby, emu, quokka—as they move through Country but devour it all before the man catches up to them. Hungry and frustrated, the man waits for the dogs to fall asleep when they reach the coast and builds a ring of fire around them. The dogs awake, jump through the flames, roll into the ocean, and swim away to the east. Far away the man’s brother is fishing and notices dogs’ heads bobbing in the water. His dogs have returned to him as seals; hence the Noongar term for seals is *dwoortbaalkaat*, a compound word that breaks down to “dog-its-head.”⁵⁰ Laves’s field notes and the account of senior Noongar woman

Hazel Brown explain that the seals and the brother can be seen today as large rocks somewhere along the coastline.

I began volunteering with Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories toward the end of 2010. After establishing their website I became increasingly involved in Wirlomin activities, assisting with the organization of subsequent workshops and serving on the committee. Given my background as a musician and family connection to the Wirlomin clan, the senior people encouraged me to find out more about old Noongar songs in order to incorporate singing into language revitalization activities. Many senior people in the group remembered their elders singing but had trouble remembering the songs. Thus it became necessary to consult not just the community but archival sources as well. Out of this came a doctoral study of the aesthetics and potential sustainability of Noongar song and subsequent projects funded by the Australian Research Council to investigate the potential for archival songs to contribute to the revitalization of Noongar language and heritage.

The earliest archival audio of Noongar song I located during this research was recorded in 1965 by linguist Luise Hercus and performed by Charlie Traveller. Hercus interviewed Traveller at Umeewarra, near Port Augusta, South Australia, when researching local and neighboring Aboriginal languages.⁵¹ In the early twentieth century Traveller worked as a shepherd at Nanambinia in the Esperance district alongside other noted Noongar singers.⁵² He would have been well over seventy years of age when recorded in 1965. Over the course of their language elicitation session Traveller tells Hercus that his father was Mirning, from the coastal area on the border of Western Australia and South Australia. In her social history *Mirning: We Are the Whales*, Iris Burgoyne acknowledges Traveller as a senior Mirning cultural knowledge holder.⁵³ Traveller also reveals to Hercus that his mother was Noongar from Esperance, over 560 miles west of the South Australian border, on the south coast of Western Australia. Throughout the recording Traveller speaks in Mirning language and English. However, he also enthusiastically performs a Noongar song, much to Hercus's audible surprise. Discussion on the field recording suggests that Traveller was present at public performances of these songs as a young man. Traveller also tells of visits to locations

throughout Western Australia, where, as a result of sharing songs with other Aboriginal people, he was lauded for his abilities as a songman.

Listening to the field recording of Traveller at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies audiovisual archive in 2012, I was struck by the repeated lyric in his lone Noongar song, “Mangartanga-Dwoorta-Yirang-Baal-Kaarliny,” recognizing the terms *mangart* (jam wattle), *dwoort* (dog), *yira* (high), and *kaarl* (fire). When I sang the song for Noongar language teacher aunty Iris Woods in Albany a few months later, she loosely translated the phrase as “dog among the jam wattle jumping up on fire.”⁵⁴ Jam wattle (*Acacia acuminata*) is commonly found in the vicinity of Fitzgerald River National Park, adding evidence to link this song with the George Nelly story. In October 2015 I joined a party of eight Noongar men, including George Nelly’s son Russell, to venture into the park in search of the large rocks described. We were armed with the story, the song, and a map with a smattering of Noongar place names in and around Fitzgerald River National Park referring to dogs, including Tooardup, Twertatup Creek, and Twertup Creek, plus a location named Wetj Koorl (emu move).

Certain areas of the park were restricted to protect the region’s flora, so we had to negotiate with the Department of Parks and Wildlife to gain access. Fortunately, a few men in the group who regularly fished and hunted in the area were familiar with the park’s rangers. The trip was funded by the nongovernmental organization South Coast Natural Resource Management, which coordinates and administers funding provided by the Australian government and the government of Western Australia specifically allocated for natural resource management.⁵⁵ Two of their staff accompanied and assisted us, one a fellow Noongar from the south coast.

We spent three days in the park, piecing together our collective knowledge of the landscape and the story as we pushed through thick scrub, slowly tracing new paths to higher vantage points along the coast. On the afternoon of the third day, as we began to exit the park along the coast toward Hopetoun, I noticed a large rock on the headland with eyes gazing out to the sea. We stopped the car and looked up, seeing rocks that resembled dogs’ heads jutting out of the headland, tracing a path up to

what looked like a man's bearded face. A few of us sang the song under our breath. Russell Nelly said that the site was just as he dreamed it.

A few months after the trip I heard that other local Noongar in Albany, Western Australia, had questioned this supposed songline: How could this be an ancient creation story if the dingo had been in Australia for only a few thousand years? Here we are being "challenged to reexamine [our] thinking about time . . . [and] the meaning of history itself."⁵⁶ Although the rocks and seals in the song may have existed at a more ancient time, before canines arrived in our part of the world, the function of the story seems relational. It establishes a place for dogs in Country and kinship. As a further example of this phenomenon, a Noongar term for dolphin is *dwoortwanang*, "old dog."⁵⁷ There is even a rock known as Dog Rock in the middle of the city of Albany that, from the right angle, looks like seal or a dolphin. The often-cited example of Noongar in the early nineteenth century initially claiming British newcomers were kin returned from the dead provides more evidence of this historical practice of finding a place for strangers.⁵⁸ One may even consider relationality integral to Noongar time concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

Adnyamathanha/Ngarrindjeri scholar Jacinta Koolmatrie writes, "Indigenous people can be connected in the same way to something that is over 30,000 years old as they are to something that is a couple 100 years old."⁵⁹ Underpinning that statement is a philosophy of inclusivity and an inherently confident cultural ability to be generous and make connections. Participants in workshops in late 2018 and early 2019 in Albany and Esperance to facilitate the singing of old Noongar songs described an alluring quality and a sense of "spiritual presence" that accompanied the songs, along with a "powerful resonance" that focused their attention during performance and lingered after. As a result of hearing and performing the songs, they felt a heightened sense of connection to the original singers who performed on the archival recordings—many of whom were participants' fathers, uncles, and grandfathers—and with each other. Song and performance facilitate connection that can defy and move across concepts of time.

Understandings of the deep past can be enhanced via greater engagement with and investment in Aboriginal communities, languages, and performance traditions. At the very least, conceptualization of the deep past could be reframed as something relational rather than linear. Despite the “great distance in time from the present and the subsequent dispossession, disruption and dispersion of Aboriginal communities in south-western Australia,” collaboration with relevant contemporary Noongar people in this kind of work is essential, if only to avoid relying solely on the values and interpretive skills of the lone researcher.⁶⁰ By relating to each other and Country through old songs and language, we begin to escape the restrictive conceptual understandings imposed by colonization and maintained through the nation-state’s continued marginalization of Aboriginal values, concerns, and perspectives. Enriching Noongar song repertoire and vocabulary through combining archival material, community knowledge, and innovative processes of on-Country cultural revitalization can enable revelatory visceral experiences that unlock new—and at the same time, old—relational understandings. While drawing hard conclusions from this kind of work is problematic, Country is clearly central to Noongar cosmology, and Noongar discourses associated with time emphasize the links—rather than the distances—between the past, present, and future.⁶¹ Engaging in further processes of language and song revitalization on Country is likely to further empower the explanation of these kinds of esoteric understandings in their own terms, without losing so much in translation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

1. Thieberger, *Linguistic Report*.
2. "Settlement Agreement," South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, accessed May 10, 2019, <http://www.noongar.org.au/about-settlement-agreement>; Bracknell, "Maaya Waab (Play with Sound)."
3. Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*. The language revitalization activities were undertaken with the cultural organization Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories. See <http://wirlomin.com.au>.
4. Mithun, "Significance of Diversity," 189.
5. Haebich, *Dancing in Shadows*, 3.
6. Haebich and Morrison, "From Karaoke to Noongaroke."
7. Reynolds, *Other Side of the Frontier*.
8. Kickett-Tucker, "Moorn (Black)? Djardak (White)?"
9. Bracknell and Scott, "Ever-Widening Circles."
10. Shellam, *Shaking Hands*; Gibbs, "Nebinyan's Songs"; White, "Birth and Death"; Shellam, "Miago."
11. Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 1.
12. Moisala, "Cognitive Study of Music," 10–11.
13. This vocabulary study was conducted to inform the translation of archival Noongar songs. The most prominent and voluminous of the historical word lists analyzed are Moore, *Descriptive Vocabulary*; Bates, "Manuscript of 'The Native Tribes,'" section 12, "Language: Grammar and Vocabularies"; von Brandenstein, "Von Brandenstein Diaries."
14. Bussell, "South-West Aboriginal Language," 56.
15. Bates, "Manuscript of 'The Native Tribes,'" section 12, 2B, 12b: 29.
16. Stocker, Collard, and Rooney, "Aboriginal World Views," 850.
17. Williams et al., "Human Refugia in Australia."
18. Robertson et al., "Ngalak Koora Koora Djinang."
19. Goddard and Wierzbicka, "What Does Jukurrpa (Dreamtime, the Dreaming) Mean?"
20. Glowczewski, "Dynamic Cosmologies."
21. Dodson, "Land My Mother," 1.
22. Laughren, Hale, and Warlpiri Lexicography Group, *Warlpiri-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary*.
23. Corn and Gumbula, "Budutthun Ratja Wiyinymirri," 122; Donaldson, "Patakirraparaaypuwan."
24. Douglas, *Aboriginal Languages*; Bates, *Native Tribes*.
25. Daisy Bates, "The West Australian Aborigines: Marriage Laws and Some Customs," *West Australian*, April 21, 1906, 14.

26. These Noongar creation stories include Scott and Nelly, *Dwoort Baal Kaat*; Scott and Woods, *Mamang*; Scott, Winmar, and Cockles, *Ngaawily Nop*; Yorkshire-Selby, *Ngalang Wongi Ngalang Boodja*; Knapp, *Mirnang Waangkananiny*.
27. Turner, *Afterlife before Genesis*.
28. Bates, *Native Tribes*, 335.
29. Budhwa, "Witnessing Catastrophe."
30. Bates, "Manuscript of 'The Native Tribes,'" section 11, 3a, ii; von Brandenstein, "Sound Recordings."
31. Swain, *Place for Strangers*, 25.
32. For further discussion of these musical concepts see Barker, *Korea and the Western Drumset*.
33. Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, 123.
34. Keogh, "Nurlu Songs."
35. Barwick, *Preliminary Report*.
36. Marett and Barwick, "Musical and Linguistic Perspectives"; Stubington, *Singing the Land*.
37. Bates, "Manuscript of 'The Native Tribes,'" section 11, 3a, ii.
38. Bates, "Manuscript of 'The Native Tribes,'" section 11, 3a, ii.
39. Bates, "Manuscript of 'The Native Tribes,'" section 11, 3a, ii.
40. Millett, *Australian Parsonage*, 230.
41. Scott and Brown, *Kayang and Me*, 29.
42. Chatwin, *Songlines*, 2.
43. Magowan, *Melodies of Mourning*.
44. Walsh, "What Is a Songline?"
45. Ellis, "Time Consciousness," 153.
46. Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples*, 33.
47. Bell, "Linguistic Continuity."
48. Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project home page, accessed May 14, 2019, <http://wirlomin.com.au>.
49. Scott and Nelly, *Dwoort Baal Kaat*.
50. Scott and Nelly, *Dwoort Baal Kaat*.
51. Hercus, "Songs, Mythology, Language Elicitation."
52. Dimer, *Elsewhere Fine*, 29.
53. Burgoyne, *Mirning*.
54. Iris Woods, personal communication with author, 2013.
55. South Coast Natural Resource Management home page, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://southcoastnrm.com.au>.
56. Lord Smail, Foreword.
57. von Brandenstein, "Von Brandenstein Diaries."

58. Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*; Bates, "West Australian Aborigines"; Swain, *Place for Strangers*.
59. Jacinta Koolmatrie, "The Western World Is Just Catching Up to What We Know," *Guardian*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/02/the-western-world-is-just-catching-up-to-what-we-know>.
60. Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe*, 20; Bracknell, "Re-imagining Frontiers."
61. Woollorton, Collard, and Horwitz, "Land Still Speaks."

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CHAPTER 4

Songs and the Deep Present

Linda Barwick

This chapter contributes to frameworks for understanding the deep human past by considering how expansion of attention to the present, through performance among other practices, can change one's awareness of self in relation to the world in all its aspects. In particular, through close attention to repetition phenomena in one Warlpiri women's ceremonial song, I explore how nonlinear temporal structures in music may contribute to time "collapse"—that is, how "Indigenous embodied practices for knowing, remembering and re-enacting the past in the present blur the distinctions between time, making all history 'now.'"¹ Even though past performances may have left few or no traces in the material record, I suggest that musical performance and cognition have operated and continue to operate as integral and deeply embedded components within an interplay of multiple interacting and socially negotiated responses to the world.²

In many Australian Indigenous societies consciousness of time is deeply integrated with consciousness of place and of other phenomena of the "Dreaming," the most common English term for a widespread Australian concept termed *jukurrpa* (sometimes spelled *tjukurrpa*) in many Central Australian languages, including Warlpiri.³ The scope of *jukurrpa* is space, time, and creative action. Totemic ancestors, beings who are conceived as both actual and spiritual ancestors of contemporary people and are

often referred to in English as Dreamings, performed actions in a “time out of time” that created and structured today’s experiential world—including the landscape, all beings that live in it, and the laws and codes (languages, ceremonies, kinship systems) that enable them to interact and be fecund.⁴ This creative period can be thought of as belonging to a deep present rather than a deep past, in that ancestral power continues to reside in and activate the experiential world. Through ceremonial embodiment of the activities and words of totemic ancestors passed on via previous generations, performers create multilayered stories emplaced in Country, from which contemporary identities emerge.

As Tim Ingold observes of landscape more generally, “For both the archaeologist and the native dweller, the landscape tells—or rather *is*—a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation.”⁵ The entanglement of space and time within human cognition has been recognized by cognitive psychologists, who have also explored the perceptual basis of time consciousness.⁶ Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz’s interesting work on the extension of human time cognition through the use of material culture discusses landscape as one example of an “epistemic aid” to memorization of oral narratives.⁷ Place and time are also entangled in many languages throughout the world.⁸ Anthropology and archaeology, too, are interested in how conceptions of time inform social life.⁹

Anthropologists have argued that shared social conventions of classical Aboriginal societies, including a primary focus on place through the totemic division of the landscape, a shallow genealogical horizon involving avoidance of the names of the dead, and operation of a “hearsay” rule, contribute to concepts of time that are oriented to relationality, sequencing of events in place, and a consciousness of the past being ever-present within the landscape.¹⁰ Because of a shallow genealogical horizon that generally extends back only to people known personally by those currently alive, forebears beyond that horizon merge into the same category of ancestor as world-creating Dreaming beings. Anthropologist Sylvie Poirier observes that for many Aboriginal people, “reality unfolds and reveals itself through the multiple interactions and relations among

the different constituents of the world, be they human, non-human, or ancestral.” She describes Aboriginal approaches to time as “relational and process-oriented rather than linear and genealogical,” noting that “it cannot be dissociated from place.”¹¹ Anthropologist Howard Morphy argues that in northeast Arnhem Land, landscape acts as a “machine for the suppression of history” through practices of recycling names of people and places, “blurring distinctions and collapsing generations.” Far from suggesting that Aboriginal cultural systems are static or conservative, Morphy continues, “the very capacity of the system to mask history means it has been able to accommodate change.”¹²

Morphy’s formulation of landscape as a “machine for the suppression of history” refers obliquely to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s assessment of myth and music as *des machines à supprimer le temps* (instruments for obliterating time).¹³ Unlike Morphy, Lévi-Strauss is concerned with how the reception of music and narrative changes cognition of time: “It is as if music and mythology needed time only in order to deny it.” Music makes time seem to pause. As he goes on to explain, “Below the level of sounds and rhythms, music acts upon a primitive terrain, which is the physiological time of the listener. . . . Because of the internal organization of the musical work, the act of listening to it immobilizes passing time; it catches and enfolds it as one catches and enfolds a cloth flapping in the wind.”¹⁴

As suggested by Lévi-Strauss’s analogy of the cloth in the wind, paying attention to the internal logic of musical periodicity (regular time-based patterning) can disrupt the everyday sense of the passing of time, unmooring us from our normal referents. The simultaneous presentation of time-based patterning in multiple modalities (e.g., independent patterning of timbre, pitch, rhythm, text, visual or movement elements) can favor perceptual expansion of the moment in time-space through division of attention.¹⁵ Repetition is one of the primary distinguishing features of the temporal arts, yet because the performance and experience of music unfold in time, each repetition of a given element is contextually different—the first and second presentations of a repeated element stand in different relationships to what precedes and follows them in a piece. It is also performatively different in its fine details; in

live performance, repetitions show unavoidable microlevel deviations in timing or intonation. As Heraclitus is reputed to have said, “You cannot enter the same river twice.”

The late Australian ethnomusicologist Catherine Ellis (1935–96) was particularly interested in the concept of time consciousness.¹⁶ Ellis examined how the patterning of time in the performing arts has power to “transform the everyday sense of time and the perceptual frames of those present at the performance,” a power that she states is accessible to a “great performer in any tradition.” She worked to show how interlocking “cyclical structures” created by multileveled repetition in Central Australian ceremonial performance intersect with repetitive human action and act as a kind of engine for bringing the past into the present through holistic embodiment of ancestral words and deeds.¹⁷

In this chapter I look under the hood of this engine to convey how repetition in song can be simultaneously highly structured and adaptive. To do this I first consider in some detail the multilayered nature of temporal patterning in one specific song belonging to the Warlpiri women’s ceremonial genre, *yawulyu*. Through *yawulyu* performances, women respeak and reenact ancestral words and actions over the course of many hours of singing, dancing, painting, and exegesis of ceremonial knowledge. Structurally, each ceremonial performance is composed of a series of short song items (thirty seconds to two minutes in duration) interspersed with informal talking and other activities associated with the performance. The *yawulyu* song discussed here belongs to a ceremony concerning *ngurlu* (edible seed), focused on a place called Pawurrinji in the northeastern part of Warlpiri Country. This song, one of more than a hundred I recorded over several sessions, was performed by a group of Warlpiri women in Alekarenge in 1996 and 1997.¹⁸ My interpretation of the song has been informed not only by past conversations with its performers, especially the late F. Napurrurla Walker, but also by more recent conversations with Janet Long Nakamarra, a contemporary authority on the song and its meanings, and linguist Mary Laughren. I then draw on this analysis to propose that various features of *yawulyu* performance suggest that the genre can be viewed as a kind of soft technology that has operated over long time frames over the course of

which song, human practices, and the environment have become deeply entangled and mutually constitutive.²⁴

SEED-RELATED DREAMING SONGS

Until recently edible seeds were a staple food for Aboriginal people living in Australia's central deserts, and knowledge about how to gather, process, and prepare edible seeds was highly culturally valued and essential to subsistence in harsh desert environments.²⁰ Ngurlu Pawurrinji is just one of a number of different Dreamings dealing with edible seed performed by Warlpiri women and their neighbors. Many different types of seed are referenced in different Ngurlu Pawurrinji yawulyu songs. In performing yawulyu contemporary singers and dancers embody the actions of their Seed Dreaming ancestors, and their ceremonial actions in turn embody life-sustaining knowledge of how to process seeds.²¹

Each song text within a song set refers to a specific ancestral action at a specific place within the relevant Country, tied into rich creation narratives about how ancestors shaped and enlivened the Country, creating watercourses, living beings, languages, and laws governing correct social behavior. Singing the songs in sequence highlights particular features of this ancestral narrative, including proposing an itinerary through the Country. It is rare for the songs to be presented in exactly the same order in different performances because the particular songs to be performed are selected by song leaders for the specific occasion, in response to contextual features of the performance such as the place in which it is held, who is present and their emotional needs, and what resources are available to support the performers.

In many Central Australian societies contemporary social networks are activated and sustained in ceremonial performances through participation of the complementary ceremonial roles of *kirda* (Warlpiri for owners) and *kurdungurlu* (managers).²² Owners lead the singing and dancing of their own patrilineally inherited Dreaming, and managers, whose mothers were owners (thus related as cross-cousins of owners), support and supervise the performance to ensure that it is correctly performed. As *kirda*, song leaders choose the sequence of songs across the whole performance, in constant consultation with *kurdungurlu* and

other knowledgeable singers in the group. In ceremonial performances senior *kirda* lead the dancing, bearing on their bodies the emblems of their Dreaming ancestors, flanked by *kurdungurlu* standing nearby to ensure correct dance performance.

I recorded several nonceremonial performances of Ngurlu Pawurrinji in 1996 and 1997 at Alekarenge, a small community situated in Kaytetye Country north of Alice Springs. On each occasion several *kirda* for another Ngurlu-owning Warlpiri clan estate, Jiparanpa, were present in the performing group and contributed some of their own songs. While there were similar song topics and even on occasion similar or even identical song texts, the two song sets could be distinguished by the different melodies employed. Another contextual factor influencing the performance was my presence. I had come to Alekarenge at the request of a senior Warlpiri man residing there who wanted to make a recording of his own *yilpinji* songs. Because I was a woman, senior men and women decided that I should also record women's singing, so each night after I finished recording the men's *yilpinji*, I was ushered into another part of the camp to record the women's ceremonial genre, *yawulyu*. Because I had been allocated the Warlpiri "skin name" Napurrurla, I stood in a classificatory sister-niece relationship to the Ngurlu Dreamings from Pawurrinji and Jiparanpa, which were performed for me to record on several occasions over the two years I visited Alekarenge.²³

ANALYSIS

The particular song text to be discussed here, labeled for convenience Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95, was described by F. Napurrurla Walker as a "way of sitting for dancing."²⁴ The literal translation of the song text in Warlpiri language is given in figure 7.

Although this song was recorded in 1996 without accompanying dancing, one of the song owners later told linguist Mary Laughren and me that women dance in a sitting posture, with legs alternately crossed or stretched out, as indicated in the text. Because edible seeds are the topic of this ancestral song set, sitting postures referenced in the song text connote seed processing by Dreaming women.²⁵ The sitting women are observed by a male ancestor who has been tracking them unnoticed

A: Nganymirdi nganymirdi nyinanjarra nyina (x2)

'They are sitting cross-legged facing away'

B: kalajirdi japa wipiyarrayarra nyinanjarra nyina (x2)

'Is it "Spinifex"? Legs stretched out they are sitting facing away'

F7. Song text of Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95. Translation by F. Walker Napurrurla and Mary Laughren. Reproduced with permission of J. Nakamarra Long.

over huge distances. One of his names is *kalajirdi* (spinifex, a type of tussock grass prevalent in desert areas of Central Australia).²⁶ The sitting postures and associated actions employed by contemporary women dancers repeat the actions of the Seed Dreaming ancestors, in stylized versions of everyday actions used to process seeds.²⁷

The *nganymirdi* (kneeling) posture is commonly used when threshing, winnowing, or grinding seeds, while the posture *wipiyarrayarra* (sitting with legs stretched out to their full length) is commonly used when “yandying” seeds to clean them.²⁸ Note that these seed-processing actions are normally performed repeatedly and by numbers of women (the number of repetitions is determined by the quantity of seeds to be processed). As suggested by the song title, the song text exists in a close—one might almost say symbiotic—relationship with dance. The song text is about two ways of sitting for dancing, but the dance movements are also about the song text.²⁹ In this way the topics of the singing and dancing echo each other. Body designs, too, present knowledge of Seed Dreamings, in iconic motifs that are painted on the body of each dancer (see, for example, the fourfold repetition of the motif in figure 8). In the following discussion I trace the hierarchically organized repeating elements in the multiple modalities of text, rhythm, accompaniment, melody, and dance and show how they intersect with each other in performance.

Text Structure

The act of ceremonial singing involves contemporary performers repeating ancestral words, embodying the voice of the ancestor and thereby bringing ancestral power into the contemporary world. This song text



F8. Molly Napurrurla Presley painted up for dancing, wearing the body design for the Anmatyerr Seed Dreaming from Arrwek, Bean Tree Camp, April 2018. Photograph by Georgia Curran.

has a number of features typical of Central Australian songs.³⁰ It consists of two text lines (labeled A and B in figure 7), each repeated in performance to give a text cycle of the form AABB. The lines are parallel in structure, both finishing with *nyinanjarra nyina*, “[they are] sitting facing away.”³¹ This parallelism in the ending of the text lines serves to highlight the immediately preceding variant words for sitting posture: *nganymirdi*, “kneeling posture” (sung form reduplicated as *nganymirdi nganymirdi*); and *wipiyarrayarra*, “sitting with legs stretched out.” Reduplication, repetition of a linguistic element, is common in many Australian languages and generally indicates intensity, commonly repeated action, or action of long duration.³² Across Australia reduplicated forms are often found in songs, where they may indicate a special intensified meaning signaling ancestral action.³³ The marking of ancestral speech by multiple layers of repetition, parallelism, and reduplication in the song text may be regarded as further indications of generative ancestral power.

Rhythm

Added layers of repetition emerge in the rhythmic performance of the text. As the text is performed we hear the same rhythm repeated over and over, with five different segments of the song text set to the same rhythm.³⁴ Table 2 shows this subdivision of the song text into its five text-rhythm segments. The rhythm of each segment consists of six notes with the durational values short-short-short-long-short-long (where short is transcribed as an eighth note and long indicates a quarter note), covering in total eight eighth-note pulses. This core rhythmic pattern is repeated twice within the A line and three times within the B line, yielding a total of ten repetitions in the course of one AABB text cycle.

Accompaniment

Another layer of periodicity is established by alternation of two forms of beating accompaniment (see table 3). There are two standard beating patterns. Single beating occurs at half-note rate (two beats per rhythmic

<i>TR segment ID</i>	<i>Text segment</i>	<i>Core rhythmic pattern</i>
<i>a1</i>	nganymirdi nganymirdi	
<i>a2</i>	nyinanjarra nyina	
<i>b1</i>	kalajirdi japa	
<i>b2</i>	wipiyarrayarra	
<i>b3</i>	nyinanjarra nyina	

F9. Repeated core rhythmic pattern in Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95

Beating accompaniment	Core rhythmic pattern with beating	
Double	 x x	 x x
Single	 x	 x

F10. Alignment of two beating accompaniments in Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95

segment), while double beating is twice as fast, at quarter-note rate (four beats per rhythmic segment). An item may begin with either single or double beating, but typically the rate of beating changes at least once within the item.

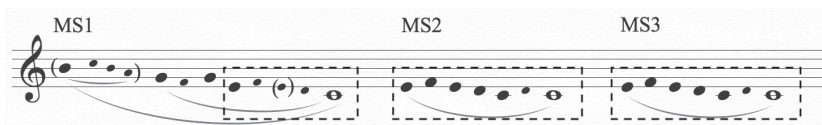
Dance

Close analysis of Central Australian dance in relation to musical structure reveals that dancing, like rhythm and melody, is temporally organized according to nested hierarchical layers, analyzed by dance ethnologist Megan Morais into dance cycles, dance sequences, and dance phrases,



F11. Sitting and kneeling postures characteristic of Seed Dreamings adopted by dancers from two different Seed Dreamings dancing together, April 2018. The Anmatyerr Arrwek and southern Warlpiri Ngurlu Seed Dreamings centered on Mission Creek (Mijilyparnta) near Yuendumu and were led by Molly Napurrurla Presley (Arrwek) and Maisie Napurrurla Wayne (Mijilyparnta), respectively. The Seed Dreamings were differentiated by body designs on the dancers. Photograph by Georgia Curran.

each presenting alternating movements of head, trunk, legs, or arms.³⁵ I have already mentioned how dance postures and other movements reflect, embody, or respond to the song text. Danced performances of Seed Dreamings show that a sitting posture is characteristic (figure 9). As Morais has shown, formalized movements in Warlpiri women's dancing correspond to movements found in other domains of everyday life.³⁶ In this case the sitting postures characteristic of Seed Dreaming dancing are directly representative of the postures needed to properly harvest, clean, and produce the seeds.



F12. Sketch of melodic contour used for Ngurlu Pawurrinji songs, transposed to place the final tonic pitch on C. The contour is divided into three sections (labeled MS1, MS2, MS3), separated by breaths. Note that MS2 and MS3 contain the same melodic material. The bracketed initial pitches in MS1 are optional and not always performed.

Pulsations in the dancers' movements synchronize with the beating. For example, during sections with single beating, dancers may shuffle forward on their knees in time with the beats, while for double beating, arm and body movements may mark the beats.³⁷

Melody

There is internal repetition, too, within the melodic structure of the song item. Each song item consists of repeated undulating descending melodic sections separated by breaths, usually repeated three times, rarely four or more (see figure 10). Each melodic section divides into two parts, a melodic descent, followed by a stretch of repetition of the lowest (tonic) note C, the latter lasting typically more than half of the duration of the section.³⁸ The melodic descents in the second and third melodic sections are close to identical, presenting four pitches in the sequence E-F-E-D-C-D-C.³⁹ Melodic movement in the first melodic section is more complex, consisting of three parts: an optional upper octave part (covering the upper octave pitches B-C-D-C), a second part characterized by undulating movement around the middle of the descent (G-F-G), and a final part broadly corresponding to the melodic sequence of sections 2 and 3 (E-F-E-D-C) (boxed in figure 10). The melody thus establishes periodicity in at least two levels: at melodic section level and in the alternation of melodic descent and tonic repetition within each section.

Table 2. Schematic alignment across single song item of Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95

Text	B	A				B	A	B	(B)
Segment	b1	b2	b3	a1	a2	a1	a2	b1	b2
Melody	MS1							MS3	
Beating	double							single	

Source: Barwick audiocassette tape 96/23B, item 13.

Note: The complete text cycle AABB is boxed. MS = melodic section.

Table 3. Melodic settings of four consecutive song items of Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95

Item	MS1			MS2			MS3		
	TL	Total segs	TL	TL	Total segs	TL	TL	Total segs	TL
AT96/23B, item 12	(B)BAA	9	B(B)		5	(B)AAB		8	
AT96/23B, item 13	BAA(B)	9	(B)BA(A)		7	(A)B(B)		6	
AT96/23B, item 14	BBA(A)	9	(A)B(B)		5	(B)AA		6	
AT96/23B, item 15	AAB(B)	8	(B)A(A)		5	(A)BB(A)		8	

Note: When text lines are broken across melodic sections, the component text-rhythm segment IDs included in each section are indicated in parentheses in the TL column for each melodic section. The total number of text-rhythm segments in each melodic section is given in the Total segs column. TL = text lines; MS = melodic section; AT = audiocassette tape.

Interlocking of Text, Rhythm, Melody, and Accompaniment

This patterned melodic sequence is flexible and can expand and contract in duration to accommodate song texts of different lengths. As in many forms of Central Australian song, text and melody are functionally independent.⁴⁰ The beginning of the melody may not necessarily align with the beginning of the text cycle, as can be seen in table 4, which shows how the melodic, textual, and rhythmic patterns align in one song item.⁴¹

Table 2 shows that in this song item, melodic section boundaries rarely if ever align with the text cycle; that is, these two repeating structures are out of phase and interlocking.⁴² Melodic section 1 (which in this case omits the optional first part performed on the upper octave) begins with a single presentation of line B; melodic section 2 begins midline on the third text-rhythm segment (b3) of line B; and melodic section 3 also begins midline, with the second segment (a2) of line A.⁴³ Melodic section 1 corresponds to nine repetitions of the core rhythmic pattern, melodic section 2 comprises seven repetitions, and melodic section 3 consists of six repetitions. In this instance melodic section 1 is accompanied by double beating, while melodic sections 2 and 3 both have single beating.

In a similar fashion to the nonalignment we have already observed in the combination of text rhythm and melodic periodicity, at levels higher than the beat, dance periodicity tends to be out of phase with musical periodicity.⁴⁴ This means that the complex multimodal sensory experience of the danced performance presents simultaneous dense layering of linguistic, rhythmic, melodic, visual, and kinetic repetition.⁴⁵

Repetition across the Performance

Repetition also occurs at the level of the whole performance. The song leaders choose the song texts to be sung and decide how they will be set to the melody, and the rest of the group follows along, cued by the lead singers. In this case the performance comprised 177 song items, alternating highly structured ceremonial singing and dancing with periods of talking, instruction, and preparation for the next items. Fifty-two distinct song texts were presented in this performance, each repeated two to five times in sequence. The particular song text we have been discussing,

Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95, is the twenty-first song text in the performance and is repeated four times, each with different setting of the text to the standard melodic contour (see table 3).

As shown in table 3, the misalignment of textual and melodic cycles previously observed within a single item (table 2) proves to be pervasive, even though in each case the text cycle once initiated continues relentlessly throughout the item. Although the melodic sections tend to comprise complete text-rhythm segments, table 3 shows that there is no hard-and-fast rule for the duration of each section. The first melodic section, typically longer, comprises nine or eight text-rhythm segments, while melodic section 2 ranges from five to seven text-rhythm segments, and melodic section 3 from six to eight.

The observed patterns of flexibility in combinations of elements that are themselves tightly structured are achieved and reinforced by performance conventions that stress the autonomy and authority of the song leaders—knowledgeable women with a lifetime of performance experience and deep knowledge of the relevant narratives, places, and Dreaming Law. The circumstances of this intergenerational transmission foster innovation, too, as younger generations step up to contribute their own understandings as they become song leaders in their turn.

Repetition across Multiple Performances

The dense and rich set of associations embodied in any one song finds many echoes across ceremonial performances, whether of the same or other *yawulyu* song sets:

The same ancestral actions (such as seed grinding) may be repeated in different parts of the Ngurlu ancestral story and thus be found in song texts associated with different places along the Dreaming track.

The same song text, or elements of it, may recur set to a different melody in another song set.

The same melody unifies and, in some instances, identifies the Dreaming of the *yawulyu* song set but may also be used within other song sets.

Common rhythms may recur across songs and ceremonies; for example, the characteristic core rhythmic segment repeated ten times to form the complete text cycle in Ngurlu Pawurrinji #95 recurs in many other songs within the Ngurlu Pawurrinji song set, as well as in songs from other Seed Dreamings and indeed in other *yawulyu* song sets celebrating different Dreaming beings. Aspects of Ngurlu body designs may recur in other *yawulyu*. Specific movement patterns may recur in other *yawulyu*.

As already observed in analysis of the single song, the recurrence of its component elements in different combinations across the whole contemporary *yawulyu* corpus points to a pervasive aesthetic of combinatorial flexibility, in which recurrent elements generate new patterns and similarities across songs, performances, and song sets.

Ceremonial performances of *yawulyu* recur across time—not only across years, as in the case of the Ngurlu Pawurrinji songs performed for me in 1996 and 1997, but also across generations, passed down from aunts to nieces.⁴⁶ New songs, or old ones avoided for years because of the death of their composer, may enter or reenter the repertoire through dreaming.⁴⁷ The ceremonial leader's choice of songs allows for the individual performance to be tailored to those participating, perhaps highlighting a place of significance to one of the dancers, while nonspecificity of reference in the song text allows for different interpretations to emerge depending on context.

The integrated knowledge of ancestors, places, animals, and narratives embodied in *yawulyu* ceremonial performance may also be mirrored and refracted in other contexts or in other modalities, such as newly created songs in musical genres like country rock; paintings produced for the commercial art market by artists such as Janet Nakamarra Long, one of today's owners of the Ngurlu Pawurrinji ceremony; or *yawulyu* photos posted on social media.⁴⁸ I would argue that, far from representing a break in tradition, emerging cultural practices like these demonstrate the resilience and adaptive potential of *yawulyu* and other ceremonial knowledge to propagate in changing cultural environments.

Let us now return to the proposition that song, human practices, and the environment have become deeply entangled and mutually constitutive over deep time. Fundamental to this argument is the suggestion that performance conventions can operate as a soft technology (that is, an intangible technology of memory and emotion) that “intra-acts” with other practices to enable adaptation to changing environments (e.g., social, physical).⁴⁹ In the preceding sections I have attempted to convey how song conventions can be simultaneously highly structured and adaptive. Although I address ways in which musical performance and cognition may contribute to or sustain particular ways of framing and conceiving the world, the model I suggest is not deterministic; that is, I do not seek to suggest that performing or perceiving music in itself determines a particular worldview.⁵⁰

To consider the ways in which songs can be considered a technology, it is useful to consider which qualities of *yawulyu* practice foster particular types of thinking and behavior. Here I am drawing on affordance theory developed over decades in the field of ecological psychology by James J. Gibson and colleagues and applied to music perception by W. Luke Windsor and Christophe de Bézenac.⁵¹ Ecological psychology and other theories of embodied cognition posit that perception and action always need to be considered in relation to the environment and context within which perception and action take place:

Apprehension of the cyclical nature of the various temporal elements in the moment of performance may contribute to expansion of the moment, fostering a sense of inexhaustibility, eternity, and abundance, and as suggested by Ellis and others, even inducing holistic perceptual states, to suspend or collapse the experience of time.

Synchronizing (entrainment) to regular beating not only enables group synchrony in movement but also facilitates group bonding, thus promoting intergenerational collaboration in upholding song knowledge and strengthening identification with the group’s clans and totems.⁵²

Tightly structured minimal variation internal to the various cycles may draw attention to qualities of complementarity and balance also found in many other domains of Indigenous knowledge (such as the kinship laws that structure ceremonial roles) and ultimately bolster a sense of social cohesion and cooperativity.

Interweaving of multiple simultaneous strands of mutually reinforcing temporal patterning—in poetic, musical, visual, and kinetic dimensions—may serve to conserve not only particular patterns and expressions but also biocultural knowledge embedded in them through specific reference to places and biota.

Performance conventions reinforcing the authority and autonomy of the song leader allow scaffolded learning for the younger generations present and enable knowledgeable elders to adapt the performance to particular circumstances and audiences, thus maximizing the relevance, emotional power, and memorability of the content.

Flexibility of the formal elements allows for the incorporation of new songs emerging from Country, with new names or new text-rhythm segments inserted into the templates of older songs, while nonspecificity and context-dependence of reference allow new interpretations of song texts to emerge to fit changing circumstances.⁵³

Given this flexibility and responsiveness to change, we can consider Central Australian singing as existing in a state of cultural flow as opposed to constituting a fixed product. As the Country itself changes over time in response to human activity or larger flows of climatic or ecological change, the song system is able to adapt, to find new contexts for meaning making.

THE DEEP PAST AND THE DEEP PRESENT

As a soft technology, song leaves few unequivocal traces in the archaeological record. Yet today's Country, people, and practices are undeniably tied to those of the past, including the deep past, via chains of causality. Those seeking to read the traces of ancestral musical activity look for clues

not only in the physical-material record (evidence of the processing of ochers at ancient sites, for example, as an indicator of ceremonial activity) but also in the configurations of diversity in today's music making.

Ellis made an early attempt to think about existing linguistic and musical diversity in relation to change over deep time periods.⁵⁴ Commenting on the diversity of song in South Australia, she noted "a bewildering variety of genres and style, which is impossible to explain through a process of gradual assimilation and transformation. Rather, these sudden musical shifts must have been motivated by equally dramatic cultural and geographical changes."⁵⁵

Nicholas Evans and Patrick McConvell hypothesize that shared ceremonial and song practice were central social mechanisms enabling mid-Holocene (3000–5000 BP) expansion of the Pama-Nyungan language family, to which Warlpiri belongs, which has been recently analyzed as approximately forty-five hundred to seven thousand years old.⁵⁶ As observed by Sansom, discussing the widespread presence of bans on calling the names of the dead across the Australian continent and in Tasmania:

The evidence for the existence of a peculiar customary ban on the mainland as well as on island Tasmania, raises a possibility that is quite awesome to contemplate. In time past, what is now island Tasmania was joined to continental Australia. The separation of the island from the mainland . . . is dated at some 12,000 years before the present. . . . It is not often that any specific, non-material and cognitively sustained human practice can be given the status of an artifact and assigned a place in prehistory. However, in this instance, the evidence is suggestive. Maybe the ban on name-calling has been continuously preserved in traditions of both the mainland and island Tasmania from at least the time of separation.⁵⁷

With regard to song, evidence exists in nineteenth-century recordings of musical stylistic features (such as flexible descending melodies and syllabic rhythm) shared between some Tasmanian songs and the Warlpiri *yawulyu* song just described, but interpretation of these similarities is far from clear-cut, given the Tasmanian singers' stated intercultural

exchange with Aboriginal people from other parts of Australia.⁵⁸ Trading or sharing of songs with neighboring groups—and nowadays, with other social groups encountered in national and international forums—is another “norm” that continues to be widely practiced and is likely to be driving innovation. Another driver of musical innovation and diversity may be the self-conscious “variegation” of musical style as a marker of group identity.⁵⁹ A parallel linguistic process is cited by Evans as a driver for generating and maintaining linguistic diversity in Australia.⁶⁰

The fact that the oldest dated archaeological site in Australia, the Madjebebe rock shelter in northwest Arnhem Land, includes both ochers and seed-grinding stones suggests that both ceremonial activity and seed processing were already present there at least sixty-five thousand years ago.⁶¹ Since then massive changes have occurred in the Australian environment: sea levels have risen, the once well-watered center of Australia has desertified, and people and cultural practices have adapted accordingly. Mike Smith reports that within the last three thousand to four thousand years, especially around fifteen hundred years ago, Australia saw an intensification of seed foods linked to population increase, linguistic expansion of Pama-Nyungan languages (the language family to which Warlpiri belongs), and the advent of large-scale ceremonies supporting systems of reciprocity between groups.⁶²

The cumulative effects of intergroup sharing, conscious intergroup variegation, combinatorial flexibility, and context-responsive musical innovation across thousands of generations of adaptive performance-based song transmission must lead us to acknowledge that present-day song practice is profoundly different from that of sixty-five thousand years ago. Yet the far-reaching repetition of core themes, narratives, and principles of formulation suggests that their persistence today may be indicative of continuity of norms across deep time. Indeed, in contemplating songs and singing practice in relation to deep time, we can begin to apprehend how the flexibility and adaptiveness of human inventiveness interlocks and is entangled with other forms of flexibility and adaptiveness that take place across different orders of timescale. This is the way philosopher Manuel DeLanda states that languages (and, I would propose, songs) should be approached: “It is the non-linear flow

of lavas and magmas that produces the structures (rocks, mountains) that inhabit the geosphere. Similarly, the nonlinear flow of flesh (biomass) through food chains, plus the flow of genetic materials in gene pools, are what creates the structures (animals, plants) that inhabit the biosphere. . . . Linguistic structures must be approached exactly the same way, as products of lengthy sedimentation of sounds, words and syntactical constructions, and their consolidation into structures over the centuries.”⁶³ In a later work he elucidates further: “Given long enough time scales, our languages are also momentary slowing-downs or thickenings in a flow of norms that can give rise to a multitude of different structures.”⁶⁴

Of course, the dynamic, entangled, and context-dependent flow of norms in the form of histories, languages, songs, melodies, rhythms, and dances has many more dimensions than I have set out in this brief chapter, and the flow of norms continues to generate new creativities, responses, and adaptations. Apprehending the deep present of *yawulyu*, an expanded moment that encompasses the keen cultural awareness of its performers as embodiments of ancestral knowledge, invites us to consider the world-creating power of all performance and of every moment.

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NOTES

1. Invitation to Deep History workshop, Australian National University, September 2018.
2. Tomlinson, *Million Years of Music*; see also Trehub, Becker, and Morley, “Cross-Cultural Perspectives.”

3. For more on the use of jukurrpa or tjukurrpa, see chapters 3 and 11 in this volume. Other widely adopted Australian English terms for the concept are “Law” or “Dreaming Law.”
4. Dussart, *Politics of Ritual*; Thomas, *Out of Time*.
5. Ingold, “Temporality of the Landscape,” 152.
6. Núñez and Cooperrider, “Tangle of Space and Time”; Grondin, “Timing and Time Perception.”
7. De Smedt and De Cruz, “Role of Material Culture,” 68.
8. For example, the polysemy of *aak* or *agu* in Wik languages, words that have multiple meanings as discussed in chapter 10 of this volume. Chapter 5 also discusses cases of space-time polysemy in Anindilyakwa.
9. Munn, “Cultural Anthropology of Time.”
10. Sansom, “Brief Reach of History”; Morphy, “Colonialism, History.” See also comments in chapter 10 of this volume; Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming*; Poirier, *World of Relationships*; Memmott, “Tangkic Orders of Time.” Chapter 3 also stresses a Noongar approach to time that is relational rather than linear.
11. Poirier, *World of Relationships*, 57–58.
12. Morphy, “Colonialism, History,” 236.
13. Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit*, 24.
14. Lévi-Strauss, *Raw and the Cooked*, 15–16. There have been various responses by music scholars to Lévi-Strauss’s characterization of music; see, for example, Hopkins, “Homology of Music and Myth”; Bacht, “Enlightenment from Afar.”
15. Tse et al., “Attention and the Subjective Expansion.”
16. Ellis, “Time Consciousness of Aboriginal Performers”; Ellis and Barwick, “Time Consciousness of Indigenous Australians”; Ellis, Barwick, and Morais, “Overlapping Time Structures.”
17. Ellis, Barwick, and Morais, “Overlapping Time Structures,” 101, 104.
18. Some of the work presented here draws on Curran et al., “Central Australian Aboriginal Songs and Biocultural Knowledge,” a paper I coauthored with Georgia Curran, Myfany Turpin, Fiona Martin, and Mary Laughren.
19. Karen Barad terms such relationships of mutual interaction, in which each entity or modality responds to and changes the other in mutually reinforcing feedback loops, “intra-action” or the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies.” See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.
20. Curran et al., “Central Australian Aboriginal Songs and Biocultural Knowledge.”
21. For further details on the Warlpiri and Anmatyerr Seed Dreaming songs mentioned here, see Curran et al., “Central Australian Aboriginal Songs and Biocultural Knowledge.”

22. For a full explanation of the complementary roles of owners and managers in managing ceremonies and associated knowledge, see Peterson and Long, *Australian Territorial Organization*.
23. Outsiders like me who interact with Warlpiri people are normally allocated a skin name to facilitate appropriate interaction. See Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, appendix 1; Nyinkka Nyunyu, *Puntu*. Ngurlu Pawurrinji and Ngurlu Jiparanpa are owned by the same patricouple, Napurrurla/Nakamarra. Yawulyu Ngapa from Kulpurlunu is owned by the patricouple Nangala/Nampijinpa. The other main women's Dreaming I recorded was *ngapa* (water), belonging to my classificatory mother's mother, Nangala, and her nieces. For information about the Warlpiri kinship system and its relationship to ownership of land and Dreamings, see Peterson and Long, *Australian Territorial Organization*.
24. F. Napurrurla Walker, personal communication with author and Mary Laughren, July 18, 2010.
25. Sitting and kneeling postures recur in many other Seed Dreaming *yawulyu* dances.
26. Kalajirdi probably refers to two closely related species of spinifex: *Triodia pungens* and *Triodia epactia*. Boyd Wright and Myfany Turpin, personal communication with author, December 10, 2019. While spinifex seeds were not a preferred food for Warlpiri people, except in times of extreme hardship, spinifex leaves were sometimes winnowed to separate out their resin, highly prized for use as a fixative and to plug holes in dishes. See Pitman and Wallis, "Point of Spinifex," 109. Among neighboring Western Desert people, spinifex was used in a variety of ways in seed processing and storage: spinifex seeds were likewise consumed in times of hardship, spinifex ash was used in processing seeds of some herbs, and stored acacia seeds were covered in spinifex to protect them from birds and animals. See Cane, "Aboriginal Subsistence."
27. Dance ethnologist Megan Dail-Jones (Morais) points out the functional equivalence of dance actions and hunting actions in her master's thesis on Warlpiri women's ceremonial dance at Willowra in the early 1980s. Dail-Jones, "Culture in Motion." See also Morais, "Antikirinya Women's Ceremonial Dance."
28. Winnowing involves the separation of seed from chaff, usually by dropping handfuls of seed and allowing the wind to blow away the lighter chaff. Yandying is another process for using gravity to separate seed from other objects, by tossing in a dish. Curran et al., "Central Australian Aboriginal Songs and Biocultural Knowledge."
29. See Morais, "Antikirinya Women's Ceremonial Dance"; Ellis, Barwick, and Morais, "Overlapping Time Structures."
30. Turpin, "Artfully Hidden."

31. For discussions of parallelism in Australian song, see Barwick, “Performance, Aesthetics, Experience”; Treloyn, “Flesh with Country,” 90; Turpin and Laughren, “Text and Meter”; Turpin, “Parallelism in Arandic Song-Poetry.” Mary Laughren states that *nyinanjarra nyina* (indicating duration of sitting) is not a standard form in Warlpiri form, which would more typically use the verb *yani* (go): *nyinanjarra yani*. Laughren, personal communication with author, April 25, 2019. The use of *nyina* is possibly a calque from neighboring Arandic languages, which use the verb for “be”/“sit” to indicate duration.
32. Dixon, *Languages of Australia*; Nash, “Topics in Warlpiri Grammar,” 117–47.
33. Koch and Turpin, “Language of Central Australian Aboriginal Songs,” 175.
34. A feature of the musical style is that the same text is always set to the same rhythm. See Turpin, “Poetics of Central Australian Song”; Ellis, “Rhythmic Analysis.”
35. Ellis, Barwick, and Morais, “Overlapping Time Structures,” 114; Morais, “Antikirinya Women’s Ceremonial Dance.”
36. Dail-Jones, “Culture in Motion.”
37. For discussion of movement structures in Central Australian dance, see Morais, “Antikirinya Women’s Ceremonial Dance”; Moyle, “Jumping to Conclusions.”
38. I have represented the melodic structure in staff notation with a final note of C for ease of reference and comparison. Singing is performed without any pitch reference. Although the intervallic structure is clear, intonation is rarely exact and the actual pitch of the tonic varies. See Moyle, *Songs of the Pintupi*; Will, “Two Types of Octave Relationships”; Ellis, “Exactitude d’intonation”; Ellis, “Pitjantjatjara Kangaroo Song.”
39. In cases with additional sections, which sometimes occurs if there is prolonged dancing, the same melodic material as sections 2 and 3 is repeated.
40. Ellis, “Rhythmic Analysis”; Moyle, *Songs of the Pintupi*; Ellis, “Time Consciousness”; Barwick, “Creative (Ir)Regularities”; Turpin, “Artfully Hidden.”
41. Ngurlu song text 95, as performed by Ada Dickenson Napurrurla (kirda), Nancy Nungarrayi (named kurdungurlu), Irene Driver Nungarrayi (married to kirda), Fanny Napurrurla (kirda Jiparanpa), Nundy Chance Nungarrayi, Lucy Napangardi, and Lillian Napangardi at Alekareng on September 21, 1996. Recorded by Linda Barwick on audiocassette tape 96/23B, item 13, Barwick collection BARWICK_LO1, *Warlpiri and Warumungu Songs, 1996–1997*, Sound Archive of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.
42. Barwick, “Creative (Ir)Regularities.”
43. We may note that the text cycle does align with the beginning of the third part of MS1—that is, the part that presents a similar melodic descent to that found in parts 2 and 3.
44. Ellis, Barwick, and Morais, “Overlapping Time Structures,

44. Turpin and Fabb, "Brilliance as Cognitive Complexity."
46. *Yawulyu* dreaming songs, although performed by women, are passed down via the grandfather and father's line, so women, having inherited authority in their Country and Dreamings from their father, pass ownership to their brothers' daughters. Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*; Barwick, Laughren, and Turpin, "Sustaining Women's Yawulyu/Awelye."
47. Dussart, *Politics of Ritual*.
48. For example, the track "Jiparunpa" on B. Murphy and Band Nomadic's album *Freedom Road* (shortlisted for the 2010 Indigenous Music Awards) features part of a Ngurlu Jiparanpa song performed by F. Walker Napurrurla.
49. In "Technology of Enchantment," Gell proposes that approaching the arts as a type of technology provides a methodological framework for anthropologists and other social scientists to engage with artistic phenomena.
50. Chapter 7 of this volume stresses the need for nuanced understandings of cultural differences while avoiding exoticization and mystification.
51. Gibson, "Theory of Affordances"; Windsor and de Bézenac, "Music and Affordances."
52. Clayton, Sager, and Will, "In Time with the Music."
53. Turpin, "Artfully Hidden."
54. Ellis, "Folk Song Migration"; Ellis, "Aboriginal Songs of South Australia."
55. Ellis, "Aboriginal Songs of South Australia," 137.
56. Evans and McConvell, "Enigma of Pama-Nyungan Expansion," 185; Bouckaert, Bowern, and Atkinson, "Origin and Expansion."
57. Sansom, "Brief Reach of History," 157.
58. Moyle, "Two Native Song Styles"; Longman, "Songs of the Tasmanian Aborigines"; Skinner, "Recovering Musical Data."
59. Barwick, "Musical Form and Style"; Treloyn, "Cross and Square."
60. Evans, *Dying Words*; Evans, "Culture and Structuration." Chapter 8 of this volume also addresses the socially embedded nature of technological innovation.
61. Clarkson et al., "Human Occupation."
62. Smith, "Antiquity of Seedgrinding"; Smith, *Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*; Evans and McConvell, "Enigma of Pama-Nyungan Expansion." Chapter 6 of this volume points out that linguistic evidence supports archaeological evidence of changes in seed-grinding technology within the last few thousand years. Chapter 1 also references the presence of grinding technologies in the author's Ngarigu country.
63. DeLanda, "Virtual Environments."
64. DeLanda, "Geology of Morals."

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PART 2

Time's Archive? The Language of Words

CHAPTER 5

Yirriyengburnama-langwa mamawura-langwa

Talking about Time in Anindilyakwa

James Bednall

Expression of time is one of the fundamental features of human perception and communication, with time and space being “the basic categories of our experience and our cognition.”¹ Time is an essential part of our relationship with the world and has implications for our daily routine, the customary activities we undertake, and our planning of future endeavors.² This chapter considers salient notions of time and temporality in Anindilyakwa, an Australian Aboriginal language spoken on the Groote Eylandt archipelago in northeast Arnhem Land. I outline a general background to the social and cultural organization of Groote Eylandters, highlighting key social aspects of life involving kinship and totemic relationships. This provides a contextual backdrop for examining salient time words in this language. A key theme that interweaves throughout this chapter is the close connections that these time words often share with place and Country, the environment, changing weather patterns, and the local ecology.

The first section gives a brief general introduction to the Anindilyakwa language, the people of the Groote Eylandt archipelago, and the social organization of Groote Eylandters, focusing particularly on the connection of time with *amalawudawarra* (totems, Dreamings). The second section then explores some of the most salient time words and concepts in Anindilyakwa. I look at the way intervals of time are categorized and distributed, paying close attention to connections with the natural environment, the



M2. Anindilyakwa and surrounding languages. Harvey, “Non-Pama-Nyungan Languages.”

winds, the sun and the moon, and the changing phases in the life cycles of animal, plant, and sea life. I then discuss time words with a movable temporal reference point (e.g., words like “today,” “yesterday,” and “tomorrow” in English), considering similarities and differences in meanings, the precision of these words with respect to expressing particular intervals of time, and how we can better understand them in the wider context of other Australian languages. Finally, I examine the intersecting domains of space and time, given the many parallels in the expression of spatial and temporal language in various lexical and grammatical domains in Anindilyakwa.

WARUMAMALYA, ANGALYA, AYAKWA, PEOPLE, PLACE, LANGUAGE

Anindilyakwa is a language from the Gunwinyguan language family, spoken on the Groote Eylandt archipelago, in the Gulf of Carpentaria,

Northern Territory (as shown in relation to the surrounding language groups in map 2). The archipelago is located 27 miles east of the Arnhem Land coast, consisting of over one hundred islands that range in size from small rocky outcrops tens of meters across to Groote Eylandt, the largest landmass in the archipelago.³ There are four communities and numerous outstations on the two largest islands: Groote Eylandt and Amakalyuwakba (Bickerton Island).

Anindilyakwa is a fairly vibrant language, spoken by over fifteen hundred people, and is one of the few Australian languages still being acquired by children.⁴ Warnumamalya is the Anindilyakwa word for “people.” This word is regularly used to refer to Aboriginal people (particularly the Aboriginal people of the Groote Eylandt archipelago), as opposed to Wurrumangkadirra (non-Indigenous people), and is used in this capacity throughout this chapter.

AMALAWUDAWARRA, TOTEMS, DREAMINGS:
CONNECTING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Arakburakba-kiya-wiya enikaduwa-wiya angalya engkinyungwurra nuwambilyu-wiya, “Long, long ago, this place was new, pristine and untouched.”

—Judy Lalara and Lily Yantarrnga, 2019

At the center of Warnumamalya social and cultural organization is family and kinship—that is, how people are related (by blood or marriage) to one another.⁵ Kinship relations are necessary for knowing and recognizing social and spiritual aspects of life, including which clan and moiety one belongs to and, accordingly, which amalawudawarra one is associated with. There are fourteen clan groups of the Groote Eylandt archipelago, which divide into two exogamous patrilineal moieties.⁶ These moieties are unnamed. People refer to them as Moiety 1 and Moiety 2 or with the ego-centric reference of *yirr-enikbirra*, “us, our moiety,” and *wurr-enikabirra*, “them, their moiety.” This is in contrast to named moieties of neighboring language groups on the mainland.⁷ The deep attachment people have to their land is reflected in many of the names of the clan groups, which generally have the meaning of “the people belonging to a specific place.”

For example, the clan group name *warning-awarrikba* is derived from the place name *Awarrikba* with the prefix *warning-* (meaning “belonging to”).⁸

Each clan has a number of totems—animals, birds, fish, plants, and other items—with which people belonging to that clan are associated. Some totems are of greater significance to a clan than others and thus tend to feature in stories and songs.⁹ The connection between stories and totems can be observed in the Anindilyakwa names for these notions: *alawudawarra* and *amalawudawarra*. *Alawudawarra* is the word for “story” in Anindilyakwa. This can be any type of story: contemporary or from long ago, spiritual or secular, trivial or very important. The word *amalawudawarra* (derived from the word *alawudawarra*) means totem, Dreaming, or Dreaming story, including the stories and songs associated with that totem.¹⁰

Totemism is a way in which plants, animals, and natural phenomena are organized to align with particular social groups, involving special relations between each social group and the different classes of natural species and phenomena.¹¹ For Warnumamalya, totemism is an important means of relating with the natural world, brought together through social and ceremonial beliefs and practices. Totems are central to social relationships and form an important basis for spiritual expression.¹² Totems are often animals, fish, or birds but also may be inanimate objects, places, or other natural phenomena, as demonstrated in examples 1 and 2:¹³

1. *Duwalya akwa yingakiya akwa wurrawuminya akwa yeyerringdangwa Warnungwamadada-langwa **amalawudawarra**.*

“Bush stone curlew, magpie goose, duck, and king brown snake all belong to Lalara” (i.e., are *totems/Dreamings* for the Lalara clan).¹⁴

2. *Ena alabura na-lungkuwarringinama erriberriba-manja. . . . Ena Mamarika-langwa akwa Amagula-langwa **amalawudawarra**.*

“Stringybark trees grow in the bush. . . . They belong to Mamarika and Amagula.”¹⁵

Totems are often the subjects of Warnumamalya songs and dances, as well as bark and rock paintings.¹⁶ They are generally traced through

the father, with fathers or elder clan men teaching amalawudawarra to younger men. Men can and often do sing more than one totem, however, although they will always be totems from their own moiety.¹⁷ Alawudawarra and amalawudawarra are relevant to the context and background for this chapter, given their expression and embodiment of ancestral beings, who shaped the land and with whom Warnumamalya continue to be strongly connected to today.

There has been much discussion of the notion of “Dreamings” and the “Dreamtime” across Aboriginal Australia in the anthropological and historical literature. Peter Sutton and Christopher Anderson provide an often-quoted general description of Dreamings (although this is a generalization across the country; notions and stories of totems, Dreamings, creation beings, and creation times vary among groups across Australia). They describe Dreamings as both “before” and “eternally present.” Although the Dreamtime is sometimes described as the “beginning of the world,” this has more to do with its foundational nature as the time when the ancestral beings formed the landscape, plants, and beings. It is the “logically prior dimension of the now” rather than a time that is exclusively past.¹⁸

Similarly, on Groote Eylandt, amalawudawarra are figures “who brought into being the physical characteristics of the natural world and its environment.”¹⁹ The topographical features of the Groote Eylandt archipelago and the neighboring mainland are thus connected with and can be explained by the stories of this creation time.²⁰ Hence notions of amalawudawarra, Country, and one’s own spiritual identity are interconnected and imply one another. Totems, songlines, and landscapes are maps to guide and catalog the distant past and keep it present now. For Warnumamalya the songs and stories of the amalawudawarra are known nowadays because of ancestral knowledge from long ago, from the passing of this knowledge through succeeding generations, and through impressions left in the natural environment by these beings.²¹ In this way amalawudawarra, by their reference to ancestral beings from long ago, as well as to connections in today’s world, provide an important social and cultural backdrop with which to consider notions of temporal categories and words connected to time.

TIME WORDS

Many of the most frequent and salient words used to mark intervals of time in Anindilyakwa refer to the natural environment and cosmology: the sun, the moon, the winds, and changing weather patterns. When discussing topics concerning time and temporality, Warnumamalya language specialists consulted for this chapter highlight that these are the notions and words that they regard as most important, so I focus on them here.²² This section examines connections between time and the local ecology, the life cycles of animal and plant life, and connections to place.

Mamawura akwa yimawura, the Sun and the Moon

Warnumamalya enena-manja ayangkidarrba, warningmi-yeda meningalyarrngwalyilya-langwa mamawura akwa yimawura. Mema ngala mamawura makakaruma ngalajukwaba yimawura yakakuruma.
“For us people from this island, we know the time from the sun. The sun and the moon, they know each other, the time.”

—K Mamarika† and Lily Yantarrnga, 2019

Notions of *mamawura*, “sun,” and *yimawura*, “moon,” are key to the delineation of many different time intervals in Anindilyakwa. As one would expect, episodes of daybreak/sunrise and sunset mark daily time intervals. Linguist Judith Stokes notes that Warnumamalya have “a seemingly ‘innate’ sense of time span without [using] clocks,” whereby an understanding or feeling of time is based on reliance on the sun’s movement and regular daily routine.²³ This sense of time is fairly inherent, and thus one’s ability to know the time of day is apparent without access to the sun (for example, during cloudy weather). This is perhaps felt less strongly today; however, as people’s daily routines have become more interrupted by Wurrumangkadirra-influenced daily routines (such as work schedules or shop opening hours), this has necessitated more reliance on (or at least awareness of) timekeeping according to twenty-four-hour clock conventions.

Mamawura, “sun,” and *marringa*, “sleep,” are used to delineate short periods of time, with *mamawura* in particular used to count daily periods

of time, while *yimawura*, “moon,” is used to represent the notion of monthly periods of time.²⁴ In contemporary Anindilyakwa, however, loanwords from English are becoming ever more prevalent in this domain, with words for temporal units such as “week” or “month” frequently being employed. In earlier times hand gestures could be used to describe the time of the day, through a gesture reflecting the directionality of the sun in the sky, in combination with an utterance such as *numiyaminuma mamawura*, “the sun was like this”; however, this gestural method of communicating the time is no longer widely practiced.²⁵

Anindilyakwa has a rich stock of fixed-time-of-day expressions distinguishing among different time intervals of the day and night, associated with the sun’s movement (e.g., *buwawiya*, “morning, at first light”; *wurdarriyawiya*, “morning”; *larruwura*, “afternoon”) and the changes between darkness and light (for instance, *meningilida*, the word for “daytime,” is based on the word *alida*, “paint, painting, color”).²⁶ Principle diurnal and nocturnal units of time that are distinguished are listed in table 4.

Table 4. Anindilyakwa fixed-time-of-day words

Anindilyakwa time-of-day word	English translation
<i>buwawiya</i>	“morning, at first light”
<i>wurdarriyawiya</i>	“morning”
<i>meningilida</i>	“daytime” (i.e., when it’s light; this word is derived from <i>alida</i> , “paint, painting, color”)
<i>memerrkuwilyarra</i>	“middle of the day” (literally - <i>merrk</i> - “sun” + <i>wilyarra</i> “middle”)
<i>larruwura</i>	“afternoon”
<i>meningalyarrngwalyilya</i> , <i>alyarrngwalyilya</i>	“night,” “night time”
<i>marnngkirngkuwilyarra</i>	“midnight” (literally - <i>arnngk</i> - “time” (reduplicated) + <i>wilyarra</i> “middle”)

Mamarika akwa yinungkwura, the South East
Trade Wind and the Monsoon Wind

For Warnumamalya time and the marking of temporal intervals—particularly intervals involving extended timescales (spanning across an entire year, for instance)—are associated with the environment and the changing phases of the life cycles of animal, plant, and sea life. This close relationship among temporal concepts, the land, and the environment has been widely discussed in the literature in relation to Indigenous Australians from many language groups.²⁷ Across Australia knowledge of the intersections of these domains is often informed by seasonal information. The ways that changes through the year are interpreted in different languages tell us a lot about the ecology of these languages and important aspects of the natural environment with which speakers interact.

One of the most salient indicators of seasonal change for Warnumamalya is the behavior of the prevailing winds, as in examples 3 and 4:²⁸

3. *Mibinu-wiya mamarika*.

“Last dry season” (i.e., the last southeast wind).²⁹

4. *Muwilyaba mamarika akwa yuwilyaba yinungkwura*.

“One dry season and one wet season” (i.e., one southeast wind and one west wind = one year).³⁰

There are four widely recognized winds: the *mamarika*, “southeast trade wind” or dry season (*akilarrkumamarika*) wind, which generally blows from around April to September; the *dimburra*, “northeast wind,” which marks the end of the dry season, blowing from around mid-September to November; the *yinungkwura/bara*, “the monsoon wind” or “west wind,” which marks the *akilarrkiyelyukwa*, “wet season,” and blows alongside the thunderstorms and monsoonal rains that continue until March; and the *dalada*, “south wind,” which blows intermittently.³¹ The winds are thus associated with the wet *akilarrkiyelyukwa* and dry *akilarrkumamarika* seasons, the heat and cold (*akilarrkardidarra*, “hot season,” versus *akilarrkumurdada*, “cold season”), and are also connected to

the delineation of the year by the availability of different seasonal foods, such as *akilarrkiyiyakwa*, “sugarbag (honey) season”; *akilarrkimarnda-kirriyerra*, “yam season”; *akilarrkimangkarrkba*, “wild plum season”; and *akilarrkimureya*, “hunger season.”³² The winds assist Warnumamalya in identifying these seasonal fluctuations in the changes to the bush, allowing them to recognize which plant food is growing and which animals are fat and good for eating.³³ This multifaceted combination of environmental and ecological factors that inform the temporal delineation of a typical yearly cycle can be compared with a Western representation of the calendrical year in the form of a seasonal calendar chart.³⁴

Seasonal calendars attempt to graphically “map” these multilayered properties that inform Warnumamalya of changing seasonal activity—the combination of meteorological, ecological, and environmental factors that collectively indicate yearly points and periods of time—onto the much more rigid increments of time characteristic of Western calendrical delineation (units of months and years, for example). Although such graphically based categorization of seasonal activity is fairly Western in style and Warnumamalya perspectives do not align precisely with this kind of calendrical division, this method of diagrammatic representation can provide a useful means of broad comparison between the Wurrumangkadirra fixed temporal delineation of the year and the Warnumamalya environmentally and meteorologically informed system of seasonal recognition, which, in contrast, is changeable and might vary from year to year.

Time Words with Relative Temporal Reference

In addition to the time-of-day (as in table 4) and time-of-year temporal expressions, Anindilyakwa (like all languages) possesses time words that are relative rather than absolute (referred to as “deictic” temporal readings in linguistics). These are words like “now,” “today,” and “tomorrow” in English, where the temporal reference point indicated depends on the time of speech or some other referred point in time. In other words, these time words are concerned with expressing some point in time that occurs after, before, or at the same time as some other movable point of time.

Some temporally deictic time words in Anindilyakwa, similar to those in English, can be used to delineate fairly precise temporal references, such as *arnungkwaya*, “tomorrow” (i.e., the day following the point of reference), and *yarrungkwa*, “yesterday” (i.e., the day preceding the point of reference). However, many temporally deictic time words in Anindilyakwa are less clear-cut than this. *Aduwaba*, “today,” for example, can be used to express a range of different meanings. In addition to the notion of today (i.e., indicating the span of the current day), the word can also express temporal readings indicating the exact time of speech (i.e., “now”/“at this time”) or more generally, the present time, in contrast to the past (i.e., “nowadays”).³⁵

Some of the most salient deictic time words used in Anindilyakwa similarly have multiple meanings. For instance, several deictic time words are associated with very short periods of time (e.g., *adinuba*, “in a short time (before/after),” “soon”; *adinakba*, “first”, “already”; and *arngkidar-rba*, “in a short time (before/after),” “for a short time (before/after),” “soon”). If we take *adinuba* as an example, in addition to expressing a nondeictic reading of “for a short duration of time,” this word can also indicate a deictic reading referring to a situation that takes place either a short span of time after (as in example 5) or before (as in examples 6 and 7) a particular reference point (the deictic center, which could be the time of speech or some other contextual temporal reference point).

5. *James nak **adinub** kiniyedyama.*

“James will be here *soon*.”³⁶

6. *John nalyubanguma akina sandwich **adinuba**.*

“John ate the sandwich *not long ago*.”³⁷

7. *Dadiyawena nungkwa-langwa arakba yingijungwuma **adinuba**.*

“Your daughter has *just* died.”³⁸

Some scholars have claimed that deictic expressions having fairly flexible or imprecise readings is a widespread feature of many Australian languages. This is in contrast to temporal expressions in, for

example, Indo-European languages like English, which tend to convey more precise temporal specifications.³⁹ Although these time words in Anindilyakwa have the capacity to express these multiple meanings, there is nonetheless specificity in their temporal readings. These are inferred through interaction with the grammatical marking of the verb (e.g., future marking on the verb in example 5 versus past marking in examples 6 and 7), or through contextual information of the narrative or conversation.⁴⁰ These deictic time words, along with other associated time words, composed through the addition of various grammatical endings (called case clitics), are listed in table 5.

Mamawura akwa angalya, Time and Space: Shared Expressions

Space and time are two domains that are often perceived with partly parallel structures cross-linguistically.⁴¹ In Anindilyakwa, as with many Australian languages, we find many parallels in the expression of time (e.g., temporal expression) and space (e.g., spatial reference), exhibited both grammatically and by the lexicon.

Philosophers and cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest that systems of conceptualization are built on source domains that surface directly from experience and that abstract domains, such as temporal reference and categorization, are often understood and elaborated on in terms of more concrete source domains, such as spatial reference.⁴² The relationship and structure of the mapping between more concrete domains, such as spatial reference and cognition, and more abstract ones of temporal reference can be understood through conceptual metaphors. Here the more abstract domains of temporality and temporal reference are inferred metaphorically from experientially concrete source domains, such as space and spatial reference.⁴³

In the case of time and space metaphors, if the spatial position of a person were to be conceptualized as temporally now, for example, then the spatial terms “in front of” and “behind” could likewise be inferred temporally as after and behind (i.e., after and before now, respectively). There are two linguistic domains in Anindilyakwa where this shared spatial-temporal reference can be particularly observed, one concerning grammatical marking, the other concerning a class of the

Table 5. Anindilyakwa time words with relative temporal reference

Time words	Derived time words (with case clitic endings)
<i>adinuba</i> , “soon,” “recently,” “in a short time” (before/after)	<i>adinuba-wiya</i> , “first,” “at first,” “to start with,” “beforehand, already” <i>adinuba-langwiya</i> , “soon,” “recently,” “in a short time (before/after),” “for a short time”
<i>arngkidarrba</i> , “soon,” “recently,” “in a short time (before/after),” “for a short time”	<i>arngkidarrba-langwiya</i> , “soon,” “recently,” “in a short time (before/after),” “for a short time”
<i>adinakba</i> , “already”	<i>adinakba-wiya</i> , “already”
<i>aduwaba</i> , “today”	<i>aduwaba-wiya</i> , “for the day” <i>aduwaba-langwa</i> , “from now on” <i>aduwaba-manja-ba</i> , “today,” “for the first time”
<i>arnungkwaya</i> , “tomorrow”	
<i>ambaka</i> , “later”	<i>ambaka-murra</i> , “much later” <i>ambaka-langwa</i> , “slowly,” “gently,” “carefully,” “softly”
<i>yarrungkwa</i> , “yesterday”	
<i>lukwuniyawa</i> , “before,” “before leaving”	
<i>arakba</i> , “completed action”	<i>arakba-wiya</i> , “long ago” <i>arakba-kiya-wiya</i> , “long, long ago”

Note: Text in gray represents nondeictic time words that are related in form to other deictic time words.

lexicon. The first involves a series of case-marking clitics (i.e., grammatical markers that can attach to nouns and verbs to indicate primarily spatial orientation and movement). The second is concerned with the category of demonstratives (i.e., words that are used to refer to some object or reference, generally in relation to the speaker, such as “this” and “that” in English).

In Anindilyakwa case-marking clitic endings express semantic roles, generally relating to movement and physical location; they involve notions regarding the goal, source, and location of an argument. Three frequently occurring case-marking clitics in Anindilyakwa are listed in table 6 and demonstrated in examples 8 and 9.

Table 6. Case-marking clitics in Anindilyakwa

Case marker	Gloss	Meaning
-langwa	ABLATIVE	Expresses the source/ origin of movement
-wa	ALLATIVE	Expresses the goal of movement
-manja	LOCATIVE	Expresses a static location

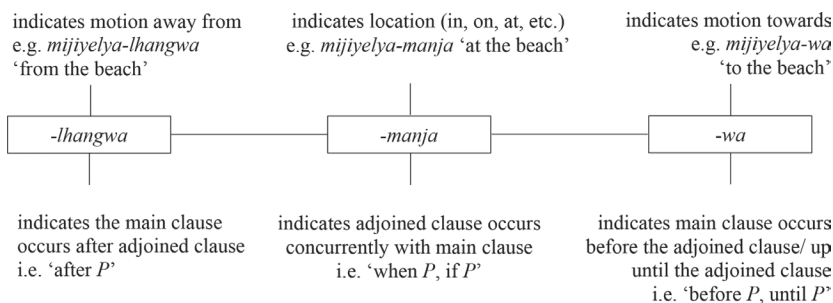
8. *Mema manyungwunya numulungkuwarringinama mijiyelya-manja.*

“Sand fig trees grow *at the beach*.”⁴⁴

9. *Akwa ngarningka nuwilyaba numangkadirra nenimikirra Fred Gray nuwilyakama awilyaba-ma Darwin-langwa Umbakumbu-wa akwa ngarningka akwala Ngukurr-langwa akwa aruma-langwa angalya Brisbane-langwa warnikibeki-yada amabulkwa engemina.*

“Also a white man named Fred Gray bought one [goat] *from Darwin* and others *from Ngukurr and Brisbane* for people to drink their milk.”⁴⁵

While the primary use of these case clitics involves spatial reference, they can also occur on verbs to carry out temporal functions. In particular, they can specify temporal relations between two clauses. The clause to which the case marker is attached becomes an adjoined clause (i.e., a clause that must attach to another, main clause and can’t occur by itself), related temporally to the main, independent clause (i.e., a clause that can occur by itself as a simple sentence). Clauses marked with the ALLATIVE indicate that the main clause occurs before the ALLATIVE marked clause; with the ABLATIVE, that the main clause occurs after the



F13. Spatial and temporal readings of case marking.

ALLATIVE marked clause; and with the LOCATIVE, that the two clauses occur concurrently. This relationship between the spatial and temporal properties of these case-marking clitics are displayed in figure 13.

As in figure 13 the physical, stationary location of the person, expressed with the *-manja* LOCATIVE clitic, infers temporal concurrence when expressing a temporal reading (i.e., simultaneity of the two clauses). The spatial reference of movement of ego toward (*-wa* ALLATIVE) and from (*-langwa* ABLATIVE) some specified locational point likewise metaphorically infer temporal readings, whereby the main clause occurs temporally before and after the clitic marked clause, respectively. For example, in example 10, the verb *kajenama*, “they will eat,” takes the *-langwa* ABLATIVE clitic, which positions this clitic marked verb as occurring temporally preceding the main verb (*karringayindenama*, “they will want”; i.e., after they will have eaten—literally, *from the event of eating*—they will then want a story).

10. *Kajenama-langwa aninga karringayindenama alawudawarra.*

“After they have eaten they will want a story.”⁴⁶

Another area in which both location in space and time can be coded (but this time in the domain of the lexicon, rather than grammatical markers) is deictic words, specifically demonstratives. Demonstratives are used to refer to some object or abstract reference, generally in relation to the speaker. They are deictic (i.e., their reference point depends on a particular frame of reference) and thus rely on context to derive

their meaning. They are often used to refer to the location of concrete objects (generally in relation to either the speaker or the addressee). However, they can also be used to refer to parts of a discourse (e.g., a text or story) relative to the speaker's current "location" in the discourse (i.e., as a way of tracking some object or discourse segment).

In addition, demonstratives in Anindilyakwa can take different clitic markers and be used to indicate temporal reference. Here temporal distance is inferred through spatial distance expressed by the demonstratives. Words like *akina*, "that," and *ebina*, "that same," are generally used to indicate temporal reference points farther away from the utterance time (and thus from ego), while the proximal demonstrative (*ena/enena*, "this") is used to indicate temporal reference points closer to (or at) the utterance time. These demonstratives and their temporal readings are listed in table 7.

As has been demonstrated in the cases of the grammatical case-marking system and the system of demonstratives in Anindilyakwa, there are noticeable parallels between spatial and temporal properties. The more abstract domain of temporal expression can be inferred metaphorically from the primary—and more concrete—spatial readings. While temporal and spatial parallels are a common occurrence cross-linguistically, as I have shown in this section, these parallels—displayed grammatically and by the lexicon—are particularly salient in Anindilyakwa.

CONCLUSIONS

The connection in Anindilyakwa between temporal marking—time words and the natural environment has emerged as an intersecting theme across many of the topics discussed in this chapter. The social and spiritual associations of kinship, relations, and *amalawudawarra* (totems, Dreamings), which refers to ancestral beings from long ago and also connects to key aspects of today's world, provide an important background for considering words and concepts relating to temporal categories. With respect to the natural environment, notions of time and temporal intervals in Anindilyakwa are associated particularly with the sun and the moon, the changing winds, the weather patterns, and their effects on the local ecology. On a similar note, this chapter has examined the

Table 7. Demonstrative-based words with temporal readings

	<i>akina</i> , “that”	<i>ebina</i> , “that same”	<i>ena/enena</i> , “this”
<i>-wiya</i> QUANTIFICATIONAL/ TEMPORAL	<i>akina-wiya</i> , “previously mentioned time,” “during that past time”	<i>ebina-wiya</i> , “before,” “a while ago,” “other day,” “that time in the past” (e.g., <i>ebinu-wiya</i> Saturday, “Last Saturday”)	<i>enena-wiya</i> , “now,” “straightaway,” “immediately,” “during the present time”
<i>-langwa</i> ABLATIVE	<i>akina-langwa</i> , “as a consequence of”	—	<i>enena-langwa</i> , “from now on”
<i>-langwiya</i> PERLATIVE	<i>akina-langwiya</i> , “same time” (?)	<i>ebina-langwiya</i> , “according to”	—
<i>-yada</i> PURPOSIVE	<i>akini-yada</i> , “at that time”	<i>ebini-yada</i> , “before, other day”	—
<i>-murra-da</i> INSTRUMENTAL + TERMINATIVE	<i>akina-murra-da</i> , “from then on,” “after that”	<i>ebina-murra-da</i> , ?	—
<i>-manja</i> LOCATIVE	—	—	<i>enena-manja</i> , “this coming time” (e.g., <i>enu- manja</i> Saturday, “This coming Saturday”)

Source: Stokes, “Description of the Mathematical Concepts,” 74.

intersection between spatial and temporal expression, revealing the metaphorical inferences of temporal readings from spatial readings that can be observed across two particular lexical and grammatical domains (demonstrated by examples in figure 13 and table 6). I also considered, in this context, those time words with relative temporal reference points. Similar deictic time words have been explored in various other Australian languages, and researchers have remarked on their fairly flexible or

imprecise meanings.⁴⁷ While we can also observe this in Anindilyakwa, when we consider these deictic time words in context and the interaction with grammatical markers and other contextual elements of the narrative or conversational structure, we can see that their temporal readings are systematic and reasonably precise.

This chapter has only scratched the surface of the intricate systems of temporal expression in Anindilyakwa. However, this brief discussion has highlighted some important overarching patterns and tendencies in the expression of time and temporal notions in Anindilyakwa. It has shown that far from lacking precise expressions of being in time, Australian languages like Anindilyakwa hold complex and nuanced ways of expressing time and temporality. It has also considered the closely linked notions of time and space in Anindilyakwa and how the language compartmentalizes concepts of time in ways that are bound up with knowledges of and relationships to Country and kin. Contextual societal and cultural knowledge and a detailed awareness of the local ecology are important to consider in combination with lexical and grammatical analysis to gain a well-rounded understanding of notions of time and temporality in Anindilyakwa.

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NOTES

1. Klein, *Time in Language*, 1.
2. Morphy, "Australian Aboriginal Concepts," 264.
3. Clarke, "Winds of Change," 22.
4. The 2016 ABC Census recorded 1,478 people reporting to speak Anindilyakwa, including 377 children under fourteen. However, this is likely an underestimate.
5. This is the case with many Aboriginal communities across Australia.
6. For further information about Warnumamalya kinship systems and social organization, see Rose, *Classification of Kin*; Turner, *Transformation and Tradition*; Worsley, "Changing Social Structure"; Waddy, *Classification of Plants and Animals*.
7. Turner, *Transformation and Tradition*, 34.
8. Waddy, "Aborigines and the Birds," 8–9.
9. Waddy, "Aborigines and the Birds," 10.
10. Amalawudawarra (totems, Dreamings) is derived from alawudawarra (story), with the inalienable possession prefix *m-* (i.e., amalawudawarra = *a-m-alawudawarra*, NEUTER.GENDER.PREFIX-INALIENABLE.POSSSESSION-STORY). Inalienable possession here refers to a "permanent and inherent association between the possessor and the possessed," in this case the permanent association between "totems, Dreamings" and "stories." Chappell and McGregor, *Grammar of Inalienability*, 4.
11. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function*, 117.
12. Cole, *Totems and Tamarinds*, 5.
13. Turner, *Tradition and Transformation*, 87.
14. Judy Lalara, personal communication with author, 2019.
15. Groote Eylandt Linguistics, *Eningerribirra-langwa jurra*, 21.
16. Cole, *Totems and Tamarinds*, 5.
17. Men generally know the songs of the opposite moiety, as they would hear them sung regularly, but do not sing them themselves. Rose, *Classification of Kin*, 212.
18. Sutton and Anderson, Introduction to *Dreamings*, 15.
19. Cole, *Totems and Tamarinds*, 5.
20. Mountford, "Art of Groote Eylandt," 21.
21. Turner, *Transformation and Tradition*, 91.
22. For further information regarding the grammatical structure of temporal expression in Anindilyakwa, see Bednall, "Temporal, Aspectual and Modal Expression." For more on temporal expression in the context of mathematical concepts in Anindilyakwa, particularly from an educational perspective, see Stokes, "Description of the Mathematical Concepts."
23. Stokes, "Description of the Mathematical Concepts," 71.

24. Stokes, "Description of the Mathematical Concepts," 73. To ask what time it is, one can ask, *mambarrngarna mamawura?* (literally, "how much sun?").
25. Stokes, "Description of the Mathematical Concepts," 71–73.
26. Meningilida is derived from alida (paint), with the ALIENABLE POSSESSION prefix *ening-* (i.e., *m-ening-ilida* = VEGETABLE.NOUN.CLASS.MARKER-ALIENABLE.POSSESSION.PREFIX-paint).
27. Austin, "Temporal Reference," 146.
28. White, "Women of the Groote Eylandt Archipelago," 55.
29. Stokes, "Description of the Mathematical Concepts," 74.
30. Stokes, "Description of the Mathematical Concepts," 74.
31. White, "Women of the Groote Eylandt Archipelago," 55.
32. White, "Women of the Groote Eylandt Archipelago," 65.
33. White, "Women of the Groote Eylandt Archipelago," 54.
34. See, for instance, Waddy, *Classification of Plants and Animals*, 53.
35. Stokes, "Description of the Mathematical Concepts," 77.
36. Sylvia Tkac, JRB1-074-01, 00:19:18–00:19:22, audio recording in Bednall, James, 2016–19, Anindilyakwa Language Documentation, <https://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/JRB1>.
37. Sylvia Tkac, JRB1-074-01, 00:19:18–00:19:22, audio recording in Bednall, James, 2016–19, Anindilyakwa Language Documentation, <https://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/JRB1>.
38. Bible Society in Australia, *Neningikarrawara-langwa ayakwa*, 618.
39. Austin, "Temporal Reference," 147–48.
40. For further information, see Bednall, "Temporal, Aspectual and Modal Expression," appendix B.
41. Gentner, "Spatial Metaphors," 220.
42. Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*; Kranjec, "Extending Spatial Frames," 447.
43. Gentner, "Spatial Metaphors"; Kranjec, "Extending Spatial Frames."
44. Groote Eylandt Linguistics, *Eningerribirra-langwa jurra*, 1.
45. Groote Eylandt Linguistics, *Eningerribirra-langwa jurra*, 65.
46. Stokes, "Anindilyakwa Clauses," 116.
47. See Austin, "Temporal Reference."

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CHAPTER 6

Australian Languages and the Deep Past

Michael Walsh and Harold Koch

THE LOSS OF NUMEROUS LANGUAGES

To what extent can linguistics speak with authority on Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (henceforth Australian languages) and the deep past? This is the crucial question. Fundamental to a consideration of the precontact situation are Franz Boas's remark that "it seems reasonable to suppose that the number of [North American] languages that have disappeared is very large."¹ In Australia we can assume that there have been thousands of generations of speakers during which languages have died, changed at differing rates, or merged with a linguistic neighbor. Geoffrey O'Grady, a linguist with a strong interest in the deep past, assumes "that from 95% to 99% of the languages spoken in Australia 15,000 years ago have long since become extinct." He goes on to say, "The linguistic situation in Australia 15,000 years ago can presumably in no way ever be recovered. Whether there were fifty languages spoken at that time or five hundred, none of us now living can ever know."²

Nevertheless, O'Grady presents a hypothetical genealogy of language in Australia back to 35,000 BP:³

One of the ancient tongues, C, survived in a single offshoot, C6, long enough to end its days as a contemporary of Old English. Another, E, had become extinct thirty-two millenia [sic] ago. D was more fortunate:

one of its daughter languages, D2, not only survived but flourished right up into modern times and is now the well-studied Anindilyaugwa of Groote Eylandt. G had a more spectacular history still: after at times barely surviving in a very small area of northern Australia for about 15,000 years, it began to gain in prestige and supplanted a number of neighbouring languages (A2, D5, F3 and others). Around 15,000 BP a small band of speakers, G3, migrated on to a peninsula which during the subsequent post-glacial rise in sea level was cut off and became Bathurst and Melville Islands. Powerful tides scoured out the newly formed channels and rendered contact by canoe with the mainland all but impossible. Many thousands of years later, the people came to be known as the Tiwi. G2 became extinct nearly 6,000 years ago, but G3 survived as Larakia and G4 as Gunavidji.⁴

It should be emphasized that this genealogy is hypothetical. However, it points to a conundrum in considering the state of Australian languages in the deep past. It seems particularly poignant that C6 came into being around 7500 BP but only lasted until 1000 BP. Whatever influence C6 might have had on D2 over 6,500 years, we can never recover that influence because C6 had disappeared without a trace. We reiterate that the majority of languages once spoken in Australia have *disappeared without a trace*.

LIMITATIONS ON THE RECONSTRUCTION OF TIME DEPTH

An authoritative source indicates that people have been in Australia for at least 65,000 years, but greater time depths have been suggested, even to 120,000 years ago.⁵ When O'Grady considered some scenarios concerning the deep past of Australian languages nearly 40 years ago, a time depth of about 35,000 BP was generally accepted, but it scarcely makes much difference when greater time depths are considered. The main tool of historical linguistics, the comparative method, he considered "useless" beyond 10,000 years. This is because any evidence for genetic relatedness would be erased by linguistic change over such a long period.⁶ Michael Weiss provides a more pointed account of limitations on the reconstruction of time depth: "Information loss over time eventually

degrades the comparative material to such an extent that the remaining similarities are too few to be meaningfully distinguished from chance.” Moreover, the degradation issue means the eventual complete loss of related language branches. Crucial evidence that might demonstrate distant relatedness between languages eventually becomes “irretrievably lost” as other members of the language family become extinct.⁷

Regrettably, this means that much of the history of human language is unrecoverable, as another eminent historical linguist, Roger Lass, describes:

Assume that language in its modern form has been around at least since the time of Aurignacian or “Cro-Magnon” man (about 35,000 years ago); this is a safe (if undoubtedly very conservative) estimate, since these people had a sophisticated art, a complex religious culture, etc., and such things are probably inconceivable without language in the modern sense. The oldest written records of any language are those of Sumerian (c. 4000 BC). This means that writing (and hence the ability to preserve linguistic material) has been around only some 6,000 years; on the conservative estimate that leaves 29,000 years unaccounted for, almost four-fifths of the whole relevant period. If we take the emergence of language as coterminous with that of morphologically modern *H. Sapiens*, say at about 100,000 years ago, then only 6 per cent of the attestable period is attested, or 94 per cent of the history of human language is missing.⁸

This is to emphasize that gaining an understanding of the deep past through language is a fraught venture not only for Indigenous Australia but for the world in general.

To return to the hypothetical C6 and its neighbor D2, Anindilyakwa, we do not and cannot know the effects of these two languages having been in contact for 6,500 years, nor can we know the rates at which these languages might have changed. Within the Indo-European family some languages, like Icelandic and Lithuanian, have been very slow to change, while English has changed more rapidly. An educated Icelander can read Old Icelandic sagas from 1,000 years ago, whereas an educated English speaker may struggle with Shakespeare from around 400 years ago and

Table 8. Indo-European languages in time and space

Date	Northern Europe	Western Mediterranean	Eastern Mediterranean	Iran/Central Asia/India
1800 BCE			Old Hittite (Anatolian)	
1400 BCE			Mycenaean Greek	
500 BCE		Latin (Romance)	Phrygian Macedonian	Old Persian (Iranian)
1 CE	Lusitanian			
500 CE	Rune inscriptions (Germanic)		Armenian	
1000 CE	Old Church Slavonic (Slavic)			Tocharian
1500 CE	Old Prussian (Baltic)	Albanian		

would be barely able to understand Old English from 1,000 years ago. We only know about such rates of change through written records, but we cannot know whether C6 and D2 emulate English as rapid changers or are along the spectrum toward slow changers like Icelandic. The languages just mentioned belong to a family of languages. It will be instructive to consider what we can glean about the time frame of this family.

TIME FRAME FOR PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN

The Indo-European family of languages is probably the most extensively documented. For example, Latin and Persian are attested in writing more than 2,000 years ago, while (Mycenaean) Greek, Hittite, and (fragments of) Indic are attested in writing more than 3,000 years ago. In summary, the subfamilies of Indo-European are as follows: Celtic, Germanic, Romance including Latin, Balto-Slavic, Greek, Albanian, Armenian, Indo-Iranian, Tocharian (extinct from Central Asia), and Anatolian (including

Hittite, extinct from Turkey). Table 8 lists Indo-European languages by date and place of first attestation.

There is not yet consensus on the time depth of Proto-Indo-European (PIE), the ancestor of all the languages of the Indo-European language family. Computational phylogenetic methods applied to Indo-European subgrouping and the date of PIE have led to different results, depending on data used and assumptions, ranging from 5000–6000 to 9000 BP.⁹ Nor is there unanimous agreement about the homeland of PIE; analysis of the reconstructed lexicon of PIE together with archaeological finds suggest to most Indo-Europeanists that the protolanguage was spoken in the steppe region north of the Black and Caspian Seas at least as late as the invention of the wheel, around the mid-fourth millennium BCE.¹⁰

DOCUMENTATION OF AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

Unfortunately, the prospects for unraveling the history of Australian languages are much worse than they are for Indo-European languages. This is not only because their age is much greater than that of Indo-European languages, whose diversification from their ancestral protolanguage extended only about 5,000 to 9,000 years, but also because the written documentation of Australian languages is recent and relatively sparse in comparison. PIE also has the considerable advantage of written records for many of the descendant languages; Greek, for instance, has written records as far back as 3,500 years ago. By contrast the earliest written documentation for one Australian language, Guugu Yimidhirr (from North Queensland), dates from about 250 years ago, since Joseph Banks and James Cook took down word lists in 1770.

LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE FOR HISTORY FROM SOUND CHANGE

The sharing of words between languages may reflect a common origin of these languages, with the cognate words having been passed down through the generations. While many of these words may have been replaced by new forms, others are preserved, albeit sometimes with an altered pronunciation or even a shifted meaning. Following are some examples from North Queensland that show how a word can change its pronunciation over time.¹¹

The word for “person” in many languages is *pama*, but this has changed to *pam* (losing its last vowel) in Wik Mungkan, to *ama* (losing its first consonant) in Uradhi, and *ma* (losing its first two sounds) in Anguthimri. Similarly, *kami*, “mother’s mother,” attested in many languages, has become *ami* (losing its first consonant) in Uradhi, *mi* (losing its first two sounds) in Mpalityanh, and *kem* (changing *a* to *e* and losing its last vowel) in Wik Mungkan. The widespread word for “hand,” *mara*, has become *mata* (changing its *r* to *t*) in Uradhi, *maʔa* (further changing this *t* to a glottal stop, ʔ) in Wik Muminh, and *maʔ* (losing the final vowel from this form) in Wik Mungkan; in Anguthimri this last form turns into *ʔa* (losing the first two sounds). Sounds may not only be lost or changed to another sound but can also change their order: the widespread *kulan*, “possum,” loses its first sound in Uradhi *ulan*, but in Mpalityanh *lwan* the *u* ends up on the other side of *l* and is spelled with *w*. An important task of historical linguistics is working out these sound changes, which allow us to see how words that do not sound the same are nevertheless inherited from the same earlier forms. Forms related in this way are called cognates.

LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE FOR CONTACT

One contribution that historical linguistics can make to the study of the past comes from loanwords, words borrowed by one language from another. Such words are evidence of earlier contact between peoples. The most dramatic example of this in Australia is the evidence from loanwords between Australian Indigenous people and visitors from Indonesia commonly called the Macassans.¹²

The time of the arrival of Macassans from southern Sulawesi to northern Australia, as posited by historian Campbell Macknight, is rather close to the first documentation of an Australian language in 1770. The Macassans came to northern Australia to harvest and process trepang (sea slugs). But it is somewhat unclear when they first came for this purpose. Macknight suggests that “the evidence for when the Macassans began to visit the coast is contradictory and unsatisfactory. However, after a thorough review of all forms of evidence, this was about the beginning of the eighteenth century AD. Industry was certainly in operation by

about 1760, and is most unlikely so long before 1700.”¹³ Nonetheless, in another of his accounts, Macknight posits a starting date between 1650 and 1750.¹⁴ Since then, Macknight has revised the start-up date to as recent as 1780.¹⁵ Yet archaeological research has potentially extended the time depth of Macassan influence. Annie Clarke’s research on Groote Eylandt suggests a time depth back to the fourteenth century and possibly earlier.¹⁶ Indeed, she elsewhere suggests that archaeological evidence points to a Macassan presence in this area for 800 years.¹⁷ Rock art research pushes the presence of Macassan praus in the region back into at least the seventeenth century.¹⁸ Much earlier, Ronald and Catherine Berndt had suggested that the Macassan mariners began the trepanging trade in the Arnhem Land region in the early sixteenth century.¹⁹

On the west coast of the Northern Territory excavations by Ken Mulvaney turned up skeletal remains that suggest interactions between Macassans and Aboriginal people.²⁰ One possibility is that these Point Blaze skulls document the presence of Macassans on this part of the Northern Territory coast and their interaction with the local population. William Stanner, visiting the area of Port Keats in 1935, reported seeing Aboriginal people he believed to show features he ascribed to Macassans.²¹ Or perhaps these skulls are testimony to the chance presence of other Indonesian seafarers, castaways on these fateful shores.²² An important conclusion is that evidence of Indonesian seafarers is not necessarily linked to Macassans and therefore need not be connected with the trepang trade, for which Macknight provides a fairly late starting date of the late eighteenth century.

Whatever the starting date, the departure date for the Macassan trade is fairly clear: 1906–7. During this time contact was rather extensive, with up to one thousand men landing on the coast of northern Australia and staying for several months. It is known that Aboriginal people traveled back to Indonesia with the Macassan traders, and their descendants are still there in Indonesia.

In terms of linguistic influence, Macknight had earlier suggested that Macassan influence on Australian languages was fairly minor. However, work by linguists has demonstrated that it was more extensive.²³ It needs to be emphasized that connections might not be immediately obvious,

particularly to a nonlinguist. Some examples of these subtle connections are given in table 9.

Table 9. Some loanwords from Macassans

<i>du:mala</i> , “sail”	Mkr <i>sómbala</i> , “sail”	cf. Mal <i>layar</i>	PHN *la:yaR “Id.”
<i>garay</i> , “lord,” “master”	Mkr <i>karáeŋ</i> , “lord,” “master,” “title of person of high rank” (with -ŋ loss)	cf. Bug <i>ma-raja</i>	Ma1 <i>raya</i> , “great,” “big,” “high”
<i>ju:ru?</i> , “cigar”	Mkr <i>surú?</i> = <i>sarú?</i> , “cigar”	cf. Mal <i>sarutu</i> , <i>carutu</i> , <i>carut</i>	
<i>yimbiri</i> , “bucket”	Mkr, Bug <i>embere?</i> , “pail,” “bucket”	Dutch <i>emmer</i> “Id.”	cf. Mal <i>ember</i> “Id.”

Source: Walker and Zorc, “Austronesian Loanwords.”

Note: Mkr = Makassarese; Mal = Malay; PHN = Proto Western Austronesian; Bug = Buginesel; d = a lamino-dental stop; j (in the Australian languages) = a lamino-palatal stop; ŋ = velar nasal; ? = a glottal stop.

There are at least two reasons for providing a range of examples. The first is that some of these correspondences would not be immediately obvious to the layperson with little or no background in Austronesian historical linguistics or knowledge of northeast Arnhem Land languages. A person with the latter expertise particularly would realize that none of these languages have sibilants, so any word coming from the outside with such sounds would have been modified to suit the phonological patterns of the accepting language. For example, an English word like “school” is variously adapted into Australian languages as *kuulu* or *jikul*. In the first case the “s” is simply omitted, but as many of these languages eschew monosyllabic words, an extra syllable is inserted. In the latter case “s” is rendered as a lamino-palatal stop, and an additional vowel is

added lest an unacceptable consonant cluster result. The second reason for giving these few examples is to underscore the fact that although the personnel on the fleets of boats coming from Indonesia each season were often referred to as Macassans, the crews actually included several different groups.²⁴

What does the Macassan presence tell us about the deep past? Linguistic researchers in the early 1980s could say little about time depth, nor was there much awareness about the geographic spread.²⁵ Non-Indigenous coastal explorers could be dated only to the early seventeenth century.²⁶ But more recent archaeological evidence suggests that Macassans predated this period. In terms of geographic spread researchers are comfortable with confining Macassan influence essentially to the north and east coasts of the Northern Territory.²⁷ However, we now know that the geographic extent of Macassan influence was quite significant: from western Queensland on the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Kimberley and possibly to the Pilbara. Only a small portion of this extensive coastline's languages have been systematically investigated for Macassan influence.

The detail just presented seeks to demonstrate that such influence is by no means obvious. Another question to consider is how early Macassan influence would have affected these languages. It seems likely that the adoption would have been rapid, and if this is so, Macassan loanwords may have been incorporated into a language like Anindilyakwa 800 years ago.

LOANWORDS AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Loanwords from other Aboriginal languages may also provide evidence of cultural change. A prominent characteristic of many Aboriginal cultures is the presence of a system of social category terms.²⁸ The terms occur in sets of two moiety names, four section names, or eight subsection names—sometimes with separate forms for males and females. These naming sets each typically occur over a relatively wide geographic area, which includes a number of different languages. This spatial distribution is interpreted historically as reflecting not inheritance from distant linguistic ancestors, but the relatively recent spread from one group to another as each adopted new aspects of cultural organization. This has

been compared to the spread of the naming of days of the week through diverse European languages during the last two millennia.²⁹ Patrick McConvell shows that a set of section names that are widespread in the Pilbara region of Western Australia have spread to the Northern Territory and even farther eastward into Queensland, in some places combining with a separate system of four section names to produce a more complex system of eight subsections.³⁰ Copies of two of these terms, *Paltyarri* and *Karimarra*, can be documented—albeit sometimes with added prefixes and other increments and some other changes in pronunciation—over a huge area of Western Australia, much of the Northern Territory, and western Queensland, where they are used as terms within either a four-term section system or an eight-term subsection system.

These related terms are recognized as loanwords because they do not show the sound changes that are characteristic of cognates that have been inherited from ancestral languages. How long ago did this happen? We cannot be sure, but certainly long after the differentiation of languages; probably only within the last 2,000 years—which is very recent compared with the 60,000 years (or more) that the continent has been inhabited. This fact shows that cultural practices that are widespread across the continent do not necessarily reflect a very deep history.

THE PAMA-NYUNGAN LANGUAGE FAMILY

Since the 1960s linguists have recognized and confirmed a large family of Aboriginal languages called the Pama-Nyungan language family. It includes languages over much of the continent, stretching from North Queensland to southwestern Australia, but excluding most of the languages of the northwest and the Top End, as well as some to the south and west of the Gulf of Carpentaria, but including the Yolngu languages of northeast Arnhem Land.³¹

Some linguists have a particular interest in languages and the deep past: Claire Bowern and Quentin Atkinson apply the methods of computational phylogenetics to the subclassification of the Pama-Nyungan language family, and Remco Bouckaert, Bowern, and Atkinson apply related “phylogeographic” methods to the question of the time and

original homeland of Proto-Pama-Nyungan.³² Their methods lead to the inference of a date of dispersal of about 5,671 ($\pm$ some 1,200) years before the present and a location somewhere around the base of the Gulf of Carpentaria. This would be the date at which Proto-Pama-Nyungan began to diverge into separate languages as its speakers spread out or speakers of other languages adopted the language, which may even have been present in the homeland for several centuries before this dispersal. This view was foreshadowed in the late 1990s by linguist Nicholas Evans and archaeologist Rhys Jones, who suggested it dates from around 5000 BP with a homeland stretching from the Roper River across the Barkly Tableland and into northwestern Queensland.³³ This is not the only proposed homeland for Pama-Nyungan and is unlikely to be the last. For instance, Bouckaert, Bowern, and Atkinson mention “rival hypotheses, including the Einasleigh Uplands, Great Dividing Range, Murray-Darling basin.”³⁴

PROTO-AUSTRALIAN

Any language ancestral to both Pama-Nyungan and the non-Pama-Nyungan families would be expected to have predated Proto-Pama-Nyungan by an order of a few thousands of years. Sufficient cognate details of grammatical structure are shared across enough non-Pama-Nyungan languages to suggest that they were inherited from a common ancestral language that could be labeled Proto-Australian. These include pronominal prefixes on verbs, noun class prefixes on nouns, and the configuration of elements within verbs.³⁵

This hypothetical Proto-Australian may have been only one of many languages formerly present on the mainland—albeit one that spread and displaced the others. All the known and unknown languages of Australia are assumed to be ultimately related to the languages of Tasmania and at least some of the multitude of New Guinea languages, even though insufficient evidence remains to demonstrate such relationships. This is because the land masses were connected before rising seas separated Tasmania from the mainland around 11,000 years ago and divided New Guinea from Australia about 8,000 years ago.³⁶

ESTABLISHING DATES FOR THE NOT-SO-DEEP PAST THROUGH LINGUISTIC STRATIGRAPHY

The example used by linguist Patrick McConvell and archaeologist Mike Smith to illustrate the method of linguistic stratigraphy concerned the term for a “muller,” or top grindstone in a set used for grinding grain.³⁷ This term in the Ngumpin-Yapa language subgroup is *marangu* in some languages and *marang* in others, formed from the ancient Pama-Nyungan root **mara*, “hand,” with an instrumental suffix. Now in the Ngumpin-Yapa languages the term for “hand” is *marla*, not *mara*. *Marla* is descended from *mara*, but its form changed when it underwent a regular sound change in the Ngumpin-Yapa languages (**r* became *rl*, or retroflex *l*).³⁸ So why did this not happen in the word *marang(u)*, “muller”? Because this word was borrowed, along with the new artifact, after this sound change had stopped operating. The archaeological horizon of the artifact in the region was about 2,500 years ago. The sound change was operating in proto-Ngumpin-Yapa somewhat earlier than this, perhaps 3,000 years ago. So as a result of this method, we have a relatively reliable date for the protolanguage of the Ngumpin-Yapa subgroup.³⁹ This shows how difficult it can be to have a relatively reliable dating for 2,500–3,000 years ago, let alone 10,000 years or more.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored some of the issues concerning Australian languages and the deep past and questioned some of the conclusions others have reached. At the risk of seeming pessimistic, we can assert the following. Exploring the deep past for Australian languages faces considerable problems: many of the languages can be assumed to have disappeared without a trace, written documentation is recent and relatively sparse, and the most robust tool for comparative linguistics extends only to around 10,000 BP. In the Australian case historical linguistic research can be expected to recover only a fraction—and a relatively recent one—of the total history of Indigenous languages that were once spoken in Australia.

NOTES

1. Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*, 212.
2. O'Grady, "Preliminaries," 112.
3. Walsh, "How Many Australian Languages?," 408.
4. O'Grady, "Preliminaries," 112–14. O'Grady's D2 Anindilyaugwa, given as a hypothetical example of a language unrelated to other continental languages, has now been proved to belong to the Gunwinyguan family of Arnhem Land. Van Egmond, "Enindhilyakwa Phonology."
5. "Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Collection Timeline," Australian Museum, updated December 12, 2019, <https://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia-timeline-pre-contact>.
6. McConvell and Evans, "Clues to Australia's Human Past," 5.
7. Weiss, "Comparative Method," 138. See also Harrison, "On the Limits."
8. Lass, *Historical Linguistics*, 22.
9. Clackson, *Indo-European Linguistics*, 15–19.
10. Fortson, "Indo-European," 645.
11. These forms are taken from Sutton, *Languages of Cape York*.
12. Although often referred to as Macassans, the crews also included Buginese, Makassarese, and Malays.
13. Macknight, "Macassans and Aborigines," 284.
14. Macknight, *Voyage to Marege*.
15. Macknight, "Studying Trepangers," 21.
16. Clarke, "'Moorman's Trowsers.'"
17. Clarke, "Winds of Change."
18. Taçon and May, "Rock Art Evidence."
19. Berndt and Berndt. "Card Games," 249. See also Berndt and Berndt, *Arnhem Land*.
20. Mulvaney, "Patterns of Variation."
21. Stanner, "Along the Tamarind Coast."
22. Mulvaney, "Patterns of Variation," 40.
23. For northeast Arnhem Land, see Walker and Zorc, "Austronesian Loanwords"; for western Arnhem Land and farther west, see Evans, "Macassan Loanwords"; Evans, "Macassan Loans."
24. The term "Malay" was also used rather indiscriminately by early recorders, and if anything, the sociolinguistic situation that underpins "Malays" is a good deal more complicated than that of the "Macassans." For some background, see, for example, Martínez, "'Malay' Community."
25. Urry and Walsh, "Lost 'Macassar Language'"; Walker and Zorc, "Austronesian Loanwords."

26. For example, Rowse and Ryan, "Colonial Encounter," 211.
27. Simpson, "Languages Past and Present"; Smith et al., "Migration and Deep History."
28. For an overview of these concepts, see "The AustKin Project," Australian National University, <http://www.austkin.net/>.
29. Koch, "Patterns in the Diffusion."
30. McConvell, "Origin of Subsections."
31. See maps in Claire Bowern, "The Origins of Pama-Nyungan, Australia's Largest Family of Aboriginal Languages," *Conversation*, March 13, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/the-origins-of-pama-nyungan-australias-largest-family-of-aboriginal-languages-92997>.
32. Bowern and Atkinson, "Computational Phylogenetics"; Bouckaert, Bowern, and Atkinson, "Origin and Expansion."
33. Evans and Jones, "Cradle of the Pama-Nyungans."
34. Bouckaert, Bowern, and Atkinson, "Origin and Expansion," 742.
35. Harvey, "Reconstruction of Pronominals"; Harvey and Mailhammer, "Reconstructing Remote Relationships"; Evans, "Introduction."
36. Smith et al., "Migration and Deep History."
37. McConvell and Smith, "Millers and Mullers."
38. McConvell and Laughren, "Ngumpin-Yapa Languages."
39. McConvell, "Finger on the Pulse."

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Time, Language, and Thought

What Language Can Tell Us about Our Concepts of Time

Marie-Eve Ritz and Maïa Ponsonnet

Ever since the early years of invasion Europeans emphasized what they perceived as the unexpected and bizarre nature of the Australian continent. “Fauna and flora have strange, special properties,” wrote the French geographer Louis Grégoire in 1883. “We find magnificent flowers, rich in honey, but with no scent; fruit that resemble our pears, but hang from the tree from their largest part. . . . As for the animals, they are even more peculiar.”¹ Other early anthropologists shared this perspective, and their descriptions of Australian peoples also emphasized differences. Nowhere is this truer than with respect to the notion of time. The idea that Australian Indigenous ontologies of being in time differ fundamentally from Western ones has a long history, predating anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner’s coining of the now-famous notion of “everywhen” and probably as far back as ethnologists Baldwin Spencer and James Gillen’s first mention of “Dreamtime” in the last year of the nineteenth century.² Since then references to “circular” conceptions of time in Australian Indigenous cultures, or to blurred distinctions between past and present, have flourished in both academic and nonacademic writings.³

It is important to acknowledge cultural diversity and its applied consequences, and we return to the culturally specific notion of Dreamtime in the next section.⁴ Yet we suggest that the idea of collapsing past and

present suggests *extreme* conceptual differences. Taken literally, this merging projects highly improbable “others,” which jeopardizes cross-cultural understanding and justifies discrimination. For instance, such conceptions of time are often invoked to claim that Indigenous Australians cannot be good employees, since their culturally ingrained notion of time does not equip them to attend work regularly. Having lived, worked, and generally interacted extensively with many members of several Indigenous groups in inland Arnhem Land since 1997, I (Maïa Ponsonnet) am unable to point to evidence suggesting that the people I met in this part of Australia do not differentiate between past and present. Unsurprisingly, they distinguish yesterday from tomorrow (for which their languages have dedicated words), are well aware that last week’s events will not happen a second time this week, wait for planes when these are scheduled to land, and so on.⁵ Based on day-to-day behaviors and conversations, it is clear that no one in these communities “merges past with present” in the literal sense of the expression.

In this chapter we seek to present a nuanced understanding of cultural differences while avoiding the pitfalls of exoticization and mystification. We first consider whether the representations of time that have currency among Australian Indigenous groups can sometimes differ from Western conceptions of time and whether invoking language as evidence for culturally distinctive concepts of time is realistic. We then note caveats to this question, discussing some of the conditions under which language can or cannot reflect shared cultural representations. Next, we discuss the expression of time in Australian languages and the extent to which it may reflect culturally specific conceptions of time. To communicate the results of linguistic research to a broader audience within a reasonably short chapter, we present a somewhat schematic version of multiple arguments and positions. We have endeavored to maintain the core substance of these insights in spite of some unavoidable simplification. Finally, language is complex and so are the concepts required for its analysis. In the discussion that follows, we have sought to explain the linguistic terminology in a way that nonspecialists can understand.

While my (Maïa Ponsonnet's) interactions with members of remote Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land highlighted fundamental commonalities in basic conceptions of time across cultures, they also revealed significant differences in practices and habits related to time. People in Arnhem Land rarely keep track of dates or of people's ages (including their own), and they rarely use watches or clocks. When they discuss the passing of time, they often relate it to the location or progression of the sun, moon, and seasonal alternations.⁶ The older Arnhem Land languages that I am familiar with have words for "before," "after," "today," and "tomorrow," but not for units of measurement of time such as "year" or "hour," and people rarely count units of time.⁷ This is also the case for some Aboriginal groups in the Western Desert who do not habitually measure time.⁸

These cultural differences have many practical consequences and are worth taking into account when carrying out tightly scheduled activities such as those involving appointments.⁹ In fact these practical differences may be one of the sources for the idea that Australian Indigenous groups perceive time differently. It is important to note that this difference is one of inclination and habit, not ability. In my experience everyone in Arnhem Land remembers the dates and times of events they care about. And historically Australian Indigenous communities have always held complex schedules for jointly organized rituals, for instance.¹⁰

When discussing the culturally specific conceptions of time of Indigenous Australians, most authors refer to the notion of Dreamtime.¹¹ While the word has complex origins, nowadays it mostly refers to a Central Australian concept also known by mainstream Australians as *jukurrpa*, from the Warlpiri language.¹² *Jukurrpa* is now used in English to refer to the time during which ancestral beings produced the world as it is today—shaping the landscape, creating peoples and their divisions into groups, setting languages, norms, rules, and so on.¹³ Beyond Central Australia, many other Australian groups have similar concepts, with some nuances. For instance, *jukurrpa* links with dreams because its events can be revealed to humans in dreams. This does not apply to the otherwise comparable Dalabon concept of *Nayunghyunki* in Arnhem Land, for instance.

This ancestral time of creation—jukurrpa or Dreamtime—is understood to be associated with the present in several ways, and these associations are the root of the notion of *everywhen*. First, creation ancestors are said to still be visible in the landscape, in the form of rocks, trees, or other natural features. Importantly, this dictates that people live in the present according to the Law set in the ancestral time, following its rules generation after generation to reproduce the same patterns. This principle imparts a strong ideal of historical continuity—that is, the perception that people’s actions, behaviors, and life should remain the same in the present as they were in the past. Among many Indigenous groups, this ideology of historical continuity is reinforced by kinship systems in which individuals along a descent line bear the same name every second or fourth generation, again and again. Anthropologists and other outsiders often produce circular diagrammatic representations of such systems.¹⁴ While such representations are mostly exogenous, they are usually endorsed by Indigenous Australians born within these systems.¹⁵

Thus among Australian Indigenous groups, representations of time as continuous and circular are prevalent at the level of elaborate, explicit cultural ideologies, institutions, and symbols. It does not follow, however, that people who embrace such representations also experience time differently at a narrower, phenomenological scale. We also note that circular representations of time are prevalent in many cultures (e.g., seasonal calendars) and that theories of history as incessant repetition are also well attested in Western traditions (e.g., religious events) and elsewhere (e.g., the notion of eternal return, which postulates that the universe repeats itself cyclically).¹⁶

LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

Because language is another symbolically loaded cultural artifact, we often turn to figurative language for evidence of culturally entrenched representations.¹⁷ Most languages across the world metaphorically map time onto space, and in English and many other European languages the dominant—albeit not unique—metaphor is that of linear movement: “the year is *behind* us,” “winter *approaches*,” “the *following* week,” and

so on.¹⁸ Space-based metaphors for time are less frequent in Indigenous Australian languages than in European languages, yet they are attested, as illustrated in the Dalabon citation in example 1, about the succession of generations.¹⁹ Note that the metaphor in this example is compatible with movement along a cycle, but this is also true of the English metaphors given above (especially the seasonal one).

1. *Nga-h-wulkun-dorrung-ninj.*

1sg-R-(younger)brother-with-sit/be.PST²⁰

Ka-h-marnu-yobbo-ng wulkun-ngan.

3sg>1sg-R-BEN-follow-PPFV brother-my

Lit.: “I had a (younger) brother. He followed me, my (younger) brother.”

Free: “I had a (younger) brother. He was born after me, my (younger) brother.”

If metaphors for time do not reveal significant particularism, could a more systematic examination of the encoding of time in Australian Indigenous languages tell us something about their speakers’ conception of time? Discussions around language and thought, or language and shared conceptual representations (i.e., “culture”), typically evoke linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.²¹ This hypothesis postulates that the grammatical features of individual languages influence how their speakers view the world.²² While linguistic relativity is the focus of much debate and contention, influence in the opposite direction—that is, from shared cultural representations to language—attracts far less discussion and has far more implicit adhesion. Whatever the directionality, postulating some influence between language and shared conceptual representations assumes that we can use language as a window on cultural representations and therefore learn about a community’s worldview by studying its language. In the following subsections we explain why language is not always a reliable window on shared cultural representations.

Words and Concepts

Beyond the case of metaphors discussed earlier, words with multiple meanings can sometimes reflect shared concepts and habits. Thus that

the English word “chair” denotes either a director or a seat tells us something about culturally entrenched practices of governance; in some other cultures ruling may be associated with standing or with traveling around for instance. On the other hand, these semantic associations are often misleading, such as when the world has evolved faster than the words; for example, in spite of an etymology related to Latin *diurnalis*, “of the day,” academic journals do not appear daily.

More generally, there is no one-to-one correspondence between words and culturally salient concepts. In French, for instance, the word *dépaysement* describes a pleasant feeling triggered by a change of scenery. Although not many languages have a word for this feeling, there is no indication that French people are more sensitive to changes of scenery than other Europeans. Conversely, the absence of words does not always imply cultural backgrounding. Think of how broad the word “love” is in English: many different kinds of love play central roles in our lives, yet we have not adopted more specific words to talk about them. In the same way, the absence of words for “time” in many Australian languages does not tell us much about cultural representations of time.²³ Australian languages tend to have few abstract nouns, but this does not tell anything about their speakers’ abstract thinking.²⁴

That linguistic and conceptual structures do not always directly correspond has also been tested experimentally. In one psycholinguistic study speakers of four distinct languages viewed videos of people running, walking, hopping along, and so on, and then had to sort the clips based on their similarity with one another.²⁵ The set of words for gaits available in each of the four languages in the study delineates concepts very different from those in the other three languages, yet participants sorted the clips in similar ways, independent of their native languages. Thus in this case lexical structure does not reflect speakers’ concepts.

Ad Hoc Innovations versus Intelligent Design

A naive assumption that often underpins the language-as-a-window approach is that speakers design their languages on the model of their shared concepts, as if following a plan. In reality, as historical linguists have shown, across the world language structures typically result from

surface linguistic associations that have little to do with speakers' representations. For instance, that the English phrase "going to" expresses future tense is not motivated by speakers' conceptual association between future and movement. The details of the linguistic reality behind this pattern are complex, but in short, it results from a number of "accidents of history" that led to the linguistic exploitation of the mundane co-occurrences of certain situations: when one goes somewhere to do something, this activity is bound to take place in the future. "Going to" is thus frequently used to describe actions occurring in the near future, and given this association, over time it became convenient to use to express near-future tense.

Language Structures and Language Use

One of the most successful demonstrations of the correlation between linguistic and conceptual structures concerns descriptions of space. Cognitive linguist Stephen Levinson shows that speakers of languages where cardinal points (north, south, east, west) are prevalent perceive the organization of objects in space differently than do speakers of languages where "left" and "right" are available.²⁶ However, subsequent studies point out that most languages offer both cardinal points *and* words for "left" and "right," so ultimately the key parameter is not a language's distinctive structure, but which linguistic tools speakers chose to use more often.²⁷ This suggests that studying the way people talk should tell us more about their shared concepts than studying grammatical or lexical structures, a point we return to later in this chapter.

Another assumption behind the language-as-a-window approach is that the linguistic tools available in a language (e.g., words, grammatical constructions) are tailored to speakers' communication needs and therefore reflect the way speakers describe the world. In this spirit psycholinguist Dan Slobin suggests that the way speakers describe the progression of events correlates with the constructions available in their language: whether it has specialized grammatical categories for repetition, continuity, punctual events, and so on.²⁸ The extent to which having a lexical or grammatical tool *dedicated* to the description of a certain aspect of the world favors communication about this aspect certainly deserves further experimental testing.²⁹

However, there is already some evidence that the tools a language offers do not necessarily influence speakers' communication about the world in significant ways. This has been illustrated by comparing descriptions of motion events by English and Greek speakers.³⁰ English grammar typically encodes the manner of motion in basic descriptions: "she flew to New York," "they walked to school." Greek grammar, by contrast, uses sentences like "she went to New York," where the manner of motion is unexpressed unless specified by an adjunct, such as "by plane."³¹ Comparing corpora of motion-event descriptions in English and Greek, Anna Papafragou, Christine Massey, and Lila Gleitman highlight that they do not differ in the meanings they actually convey: Greek descriptions communicate manner of motion just as effectively as English descriptions.³² Indeed, Greek speakers regularly express manner using adjuncts (e.g., "by plane"), and they neglect to do so mainly when the context makes the manner obvious. This demonstrates that what lexical and grammatical tools express explicitly is only a fraction of what speakers communicate, because exploiting inferences drawn from context is an integral part of how humans use language. This observation is particularly useful when considering linguistic descriptions of time, which we discuss in the next section.

We have presented many reasons why one cannot assume that language offers a window on shared cultural representations. None of these imply that language can *never* tell us anything about speakers' shared concepts. There are certainly cases where it does. However, these may be the exception rather than the rule, and therefore potential correlations between language and representations should be considered carefully on a case-by-case basis. We do so in the rest of this chapter with respect to the language of time in Australian Indigenous languages.

GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES AND THE EXPRESSION OF TIME

There has been little systematic investigation of grammatical temporal categories in Australian Indigenous languages, although recently some in-depth analyses of their meanings and uses have been proposed for a small number of languages (we discuss some of these in the next section). As a result much research is still needed before we can arrive at a

typology of grammatical features in this semantic domain and geographic context. More work is also needed to arrive at a precise understanding of the temporal categories labeled in grammatical descriptions generally. In this context the survey we present in this section is not representative of Australian Indigenous languages as a group; it simply shows some of the diversity in the temporal systems selected. Despite the limitations we have highlighted, one useful overview is that of linguist Peter Austin, who surveys the lexical and grammatical resources available in a range of languages that had been described at the time and which we will take as a starting point.³³ Austin's survey is introduced with a reference to the Dreamtime and the proposal that both lexical expressions of time and verbal categorizations reflect a sense of continuity of the present with the past.³⁴ However, in our opinion, the subsequent survey does not justify this cultural association explicitly.

Traditionally, tense is defined as the grammaticized expression of location in time—that is, when time is expressed using features of the grammar as opposed to simple words.³⁵ For instance, in English we can express time with the word “before” or by using a past tense flagged by an *-ed* ending, as in “he looked.” Only the latter falls under the category of what linguists call tense. More precisely, tense formally expresses temporal reference, which is a relation between the time at which an utterance is made and the time the utterance is about.

We use the terms “topic time” for the time “I am talking about” and “time of utterance” for the time “at which I speak.”³⁶ Time of utterance is constantly updated as we speak; topic time constrains the time for which a speaker makes a claim. For instance, consider the following dialogue between a judge and a witness:

Judge: What did you notice when you looked into the room?

Witness: There was a book on the table. It was in Russian.³⁷

The topic time is established by the judge's question as the time when the witness looked into the room. That the book was in Russian is a permanent property; if the book still exists at the time of utterance, it is still in Russian, but the witness uses the past tense to constrain the claim to the topic time, the time under discussion. Thus topic time is

not the actual time during which the situation held, the latter being the time of situation. This distinction is important to understand how we represent time in language and shows that language does not simply represent objective time.

Turning now to Austin's survey of tense systems in selected Australian Indigenous languages, we see that the variation found there reflects that found in languages around the world more generally. First, Austin discusses a type of tense called "relative tense," which locates topic time not in relation to time of utterance but in relation to another time.³⁸ English expresses relative temporal reference with what are called absolute-relative tenses, the past perfect and future of the past.³⁹ The forms respectively convey anteriority and posteriority *relative* to a past time that itself has *absolute* time reference (it is past in relation to the time of utterance), as seen in examples 2a and 2b:

- 2a. Max arrived at 10. Bill *had left* a note for him.
- 2b. Lilly met Max at the party. She didn't know then that she *would/was going to fall* in love with him and eventually marry him.

Austin cites an example of relative tense in Jiwari (Western Australia), where the temporal reference of verbs in dependent clauses is relative to that of a main verb.⁴⁰ An example of relative tense in independent clauses can be found in a neighboring language, Martuthunira, whose future tense form is used to talk not only about situations posterior to time of utterance but also posterior to another time.⁴¹ Contrary to English, where the future of the past is expressed by "would"/"was going to," contrasting with the forms "will"/"is going to," in Martuthunira the form of the verb is the same in absolute and relative uses.⁴² In such cases the context clarifies whether a situation is to be located relative to time of utterance or another time. Relative tense is also attested in other languages, such as Hebrew.⁴³ Therefore, there is no reason to believe that this reflects a specifically Australian conception of time rather than being a reasonably common way for languages to express relative time.

Austin also finds that the number of tenses in different languages varies considerably.⁴⁴ Yidiny (Queensland) was initially described as having a past/nonpast contrast; in other words, the present and future have the

same form, different from that of the past. This is similar to Japanese, for example, but also to English, where the future is expressed by “will” and technically is not a tense. Under this analysis English also has two tenses, past and nonpast.

Jiwarli has a threefold distinction in its verbal inflections between past, present, and future, just like French. Kala Lagaw Ya (Torres Strait Islands) has a system with eight “remoteness” distinctions. Different suffixes on the verb can express *remote past*, *yesterday past*, *last night past*, *today past*, *present*, *near future*, *tomorrow future*, and *remote future*.⁴⁵ Such systems are sometimes called metrical tense systems, as they measure the temporal distance from the time of utterance in a fine-grained manner. Once again, such systems are attested in other parts of the world. They are, for instance, common in the Bantu languages of Africa (e.g., Kikuyu) and the languages of Papua New Guinea.⁴⁶

Such a rich system of temporal remoteness distinctions in Kala Lagaw Ya certainly does not suggest that its speakers collapse past and present, and the diversity of temporal systems in languages across the continent does not suggest cultural influence. At the other extreme some Australian languages have been hypothesized to be tenseless. Following linguist Bernard Comrie, Austin discusses Dyirbal and Yidiny, suggesting that the former may have a system based on mood distinguishing what is actual from what is nonactual (e.g., potential) and the latter based on aspect (contrasting perfective and imperfective).⁴⁷

Determining whether a language has tense is clearly a delicate matter and requires detailed analysis, something that even a descriptive grammar of a language cannot address. For instance, a detailed semantic analysis has recently proposed that St’át’imcets (Lillooet Salish) be regarded as a “superficially tenseless language.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, some linguists have distinguished tensed languages from tenseless ones. The observation that the Hopi language had no tense played a key role in Edward Sapir’s original articulation of the linguistic relativity hypothesis. However, the absence of tense cannot readily be treated as evidence of speakers’ conceptions of time. About half of the world’s languages have no tense.⁴⁹ These include Mandarin (China), Yucatec (Mexico), Kalaallisut (Greenland), and Vietnamese.⁵⁰ A tenseless language does not mean

that speakers cannot locate in time the situations they describe. Rather, much of the temporal information is conveyed by another grammatical category often associated with tense, called *aspect*; in addition, *pragmatic* inferences from context and lexical expressions such as adverbials (e.g., “yesterday,” “in the past”) are used when further clarification is required.

Comrie defines aspect as “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation.”⁵¹ There are two levels of aspectual meaning: one is expressed grammatically through marking on verbs (viewpoint aspect); the other is inherent to the lexical meaning of verbs (situation aspect).⁵² In Wolfgang Klein’s framework aspect expresses a relation between topic time—the time under discussion—and time of situation.⁵³ A cross-linguistically widespread viewpoint aspect opposition distinguishes situations that are viewed as a single whole from situations that are viewed as ongoing at a given time. Linguists call the former perfective and the latter imperfective. Consider examples 3a and 3b in English:

- 3a. Max built a house (that summer).
- 3b. Max was building a house (when I visited him that summer).

Example 3a presents the house-building event perfectly, as whole and as completed—here, in the past. On the other hand, example 3b presents it imperfectly, as it focuses only on the middle part of the event, disregarding its beginning or end. With respect to situation aspect, verb phrases can be classified into different types, two of which are of interest here: bounded events (also called telic events) and unbounded events.⁵⁴ To simplify, bounded events inherently contain a final change of state serving as boundary. For example, “build a house” describes a situation that cannot continue beyond the time when the house is finally built. Unbounded events do not contain such a final boundary and are illustrated by such terms as “walk,” “be happy,” and so forth.

It is well accepted that the following general aspectual principles hold across languages:⁵⁵ Events presented *perfectly* are included in the topic time interval. In example 3a the building of a house is fully contained in the topic time, which can be explicitly denoted by an adverbial such as “that summer.” Events presented *imperfectly* overlap the topic time

interval; in example 3b the topic time is “when I visited him last summer,” and the building of a house overlaps with it. It is not contained within it, as Max would have started the building before my visit and continued it after I left. It is viewed imperfectly, as ongoing at the time.

In addition, speakers interpret time based on *pragmatic* principles. Pragmatic refers to one of the ways in which human languages express meanings: *semantic* meaning is the core, invariant meaning of expressions; while pragmatic meaning results from the interaction of semantic meaning with context. Pragmatic meaning is more fluid and follows the assumption that speakers cooperate in conversation to infer specific meanings even when they are not expressed explicitly. In addition to the aspectual principles we have described, linguists Carlota Smith and Mary Erbaugh initially proposed a set of default pragmatic assumptions for the interpretation of temporal relations, which we summarize here as an example showing the various approaches speakers might use to temporally locate situations:⁵⁶

- The *Deictic Principle* states that time of utterance is the central orientation point for language by default: past and future precede and follow it respectively. In other words, the speaker’s “here and now” is the canonical orientation point.
- The *Bounded Event Constraint* predicts that bounded situations cannot be located in the present. This is because as the time of utterance is constantly updated in discourse, it has no duration and consequently a bounded event cannot be included in it. Either the situation needs to be in the imperfective aspect or it must be a state (which has duration).
- The *Simplicity Principle of Interpretation* says that hearers choose the interpretation requiring the least added or inferred interpretation. For instance, it can be argued that even if temporally the past and the future are just mirror images, the future is in fact more complex because it involves uncertainty. Therefore, given a choice between a past or future interpretation, the past is a simpler interpretation.

As a result we have a set of *default* assumptions for tenseless languages: unbounded situations are located in the *present*; bounded situations are located in the *past*; locating a situation in the *future* requires explicit

information (e.g., a modal auxiliary like the English “will” or a future time adverb like “later”). To illustrate we can consider examples 4a and 4b from Mandarin:⁵⁷

- 4a. *Ta dapuo yi-ge hua ping.*
he break one-CL flower vase
“He broke a flower vase.”
- 4b. *Ta hen congming.*
he very clever
“He is very clever.”

Both verb forms could be used to describe situations with a different time reference than they do in these examples; they do not in themselves express tense. But by the principles we have outlined, in example 4a past temporal location is chosen in the absence of other information because of the bounded nature of the event of breaking a vase. On the other hand, as example 4b describes a state, it leads to an unmarked present time interpretation.

In languages that have grammatical tense, aspect also plays a role in the way we interpret temporal relations between situations. Pragmatically inferred discourse relations between sentences additionally (and importantly) enable a hearer to draw temporal inferences.⁵⁸ Consider example 5:

5. Max came in. He sat down and switched the TV on. The Eagles were playing an important match.

The entire situation is described using the past tense, which in English does not tell us anything about whether the events either are successive or overlap each other. We understand that the first three clauses all describe bounded events (“came,” “sat down,” “switched the TV on”). We also understand that the events happened in the order in which they are described to us (following Grice’s principle that speakers are assumed to be “orderly”).⁵⁹ The last situation is described imperfectively (“were playing”) and presents a backgrounded event. This tells us that this event was ongoing at topic time, and we therefore know that it overlaps with

the time of switching on the television in the situation described. Thus even with languages that have tense, speakers also rely on other means to describe the temporal structure of the situations they talk about.

In summary this brief overview has shown that languages vary greatly in the grammatical resources available to express temporal location and sequence. In general the burden of expressing temporal concepts can fall to the semantics of lexical expressions (such as temporal adverbs) and grammatical categories (tense, aspect), to pragmatic principles, or to various combinations of the above, depending on the specific categories available in a given language. Within this variation all languages offer effective means of expressing temporal location and sequence, and all can characterize situations as occurring at, before, or after a point of reference. From this perspective the exact shape of the system cannot tell us much about the way speakers construe time.

TEMPORALITY IN NARRATIVES

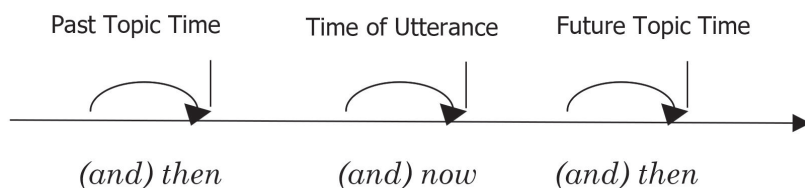
As we have discussed, the grammatical tools available to talk about time in Australian Indigenous languages present no cross-linguistically remarkable traits; they mirror what we find across the world. What about the way these tools are put to use? Could a close examination of how grammatical temporal categories operate in Australian narratives, and more generally of how narratives are temporally constructed, shed light on culturally specific conceptions of time?

A case in point here is the use of a type of temporal clitics that have been reported in several Australian languages. “Clitics” is a linguistic term that designates small pieces of words that occur only in combination with other words; an English example is the possessive *’s*. Many Australian Indigenous languages have an unusual type of temporal clitics, which have been analyzed in some detail in several languages: =*rru* in Panyjima (Pama-Nyungan, Western Australia) and Martuthunira (Pama-Nyungan, Western Australia); =*biyang* in Jaminjung (Pama-Nyungan, Northern Territory); and =*lku* in Warlpiri (Pama-Nyungan, Northern Territory).⁶⁰ What is interesting about these clitics is that they are the equivalent of either the English “and then” or “and now,” depending on the tense or time under discussion. Semantically these clitics always mean that the

topic time has moved forward after a previously described event and that this latter event has been completed, so the clitic signals temporal succession and a change of state, which in an English narrative may be rendered as “and then.” If the topic time is the present, something is the case now that was not the case before, which translates as “and now.” This is illustrated in examples 6a and 6b from Jaminjung, commenting on an old photo showing a partially constructed shed:

- 6a. gurrany burrb yirri-w-arra-nyi girrang,
 NEG finish 13PL>3SG-POT-put-IPFV yet
 ga-yu=*biyang* ngarlu \ burrb-nyunga na,
 3SG-be.PRS=*SEQ* shade finish-ORIG now
 “we hadn’t yet finished putting it (at the time the photo was
 taken), but the shed exists now, it is finished now”⁶¹
- 6b. balarraj=*biyang* burri-ngawu, thanthu=wung
 cliff=*SEQ* 3PL>3SG-see.PST DEM=RESTR
 “they then saw a cliff, right there”
 jajurr=*biyang* ga-rdba-ny=ni yumburu-wurru=marlang,
 halt=*SEQ* 3SG-fall-PST=DS horn-PROPR=GIVEN
 “he stopped abruptly, the reindeer”
 jarlig=*biyang* ga-rdba-ny jamurrugu-ngining \
 child=*SEQ* 3SG-fall-PST down-LOC.ALL
 “the child then fell down towards the bottom”⁶²

Figure 14 is a simplified representation of how the meaning of =*biyang* is the result of a composition of semantic information contributed by the clitic itself and the grammatical tense of the verb or inferred temporal location.⁶³ As a “now” the clitic expresses a meaning found in some languages (e.g., Russian and Korean) that have more than one word for now, one of which can be used only if a change of state has occurred. As a “then” =*biyang* progresses time forward in past or future narratives. Dench describes the function of the clitic =*rru* in Martuthunira in such contexts as serving “to define a kind of *narrative present*, a statement that what has already been said can be now taken as established, and that the narrative will build from this point.”⁶⁴ For Panyjima Marie-Eve



F14. The clitic =biyang in Jaminjung and its composition with tense.

Ritz, Alan Dench, and Patrick Caudal conclude that “while *-rru* often corresponds to the adverb ‘then’ in English, its contrastive properties liken it more to the adverb ‘now’ in other languages, especially when the latter is used in non-present time contexts.”⁶⁵ The English word *now* can also be used in past narratives with the same function, as in example 7:

7. “Within a couple of minutes a huge male tiger . . . emerged from behind some rocks and bushes and lay down in a clearing close beside her. *The tigress now got up again* as if in a half daze.”⁶⁶

However, such uses are more stylistically marked in English, as *now* is primarily used to denote the time of utterance.⁶⁷ By contrast, in the languages where they exist Australian *now/then* clitics appear to be the default linguistic tools in narratives. Thus these clitics describe progression in past and present time indifferently. Their linguistic analysis shows that the semantic features that make up the meaning of English words like *now* or *then* can be further isolated and composed in a different way in other languages. Ultimately, linguistic analysis cannot establish whether differences in the way components of meaning combine to make a word makes a difference in speakers’ thoughts about temporal relations. The fact remains that speakers can express any meaning, albeit using different means.

Another aspect of language use that may be useful to examine is how tenses are actually employed in Australian narratives. Cross-linguistically, uses of tenses in past narratives often show great flexibility, and there is often a misalignment between strict semantics and the pragmatic interpretation of the time used to describe events.

As mentioned earlier, Kala Lagaw Ya has eight temporal remoteness distinctions. Perhaps surprisingly, examination of tense usage shows that such distinctions are not exploited in past narratives. Lesley Stirling instead finds that past events are presented with the remote past in alternation with frequent use of the present.⁶⁸ Relative proportions of present in comparison with remote past in three Kala Lagaw Ya narratives is 38.7 percent, 40.9 percent, and 70.3 percent; on average, the present is used roughly as often as the remote past. We do not have many points of comparison with other languages available, but one study finds that in English narratives only about 30 percent of sentences are in narrative present.⁶⁹ Thus it seems that that Kala Lagaw Ya speakers use the present more frequently than English speakers to talk about the past.

In Martuthunira a tense other than past (here the relative future) is used unexpectedly frequently in past narratives—the ratio of past to future in narrative segments is 3:2.⁷⁰ This is illustrated in example 8, from a distant past story about the creation of the first boomerang:

8. *Ngunhaa* *kanarri-lha=rru* *puni-lha*.
 that.nom come-past=*now* go-past
 “It [=the boomerang] came now, having gone.”
Ngunhaa, wirra, *parrani-layi,* *ngulangu=lwa* *karti-ngka*
 that.nom boomerang return-fut there=yk side-loc
pungka-lu, manku-ngu-layi.
 fall-purpss grab-pass-fut
 “It, the boomerang, comes back to fall right there by [his] side and
 is picked up.”⁷¹

The first line in example 8 shows that the clitic =*rru* resets the time in the narrative (we are now talking about the time of boomerang coming back). Then the future is used, and we understand that the picking up occurs after the returning of the boomerang has been completed. Thus in combination with the past, the future is used to progress time in the story. The past tense on the first verb makes it clear that the story happened before the time of utterance, so the future cannot be understood to denote events after the time of utterance; rather, it is clear that they occurred in the past and in temporal succession. More research is needed

to assess whether this tendency to make extensive use of tenses other than past to talk about past events, as illustrated for Kala Lagaw Ya and Martuthunira, may also be attested in some other Australian languages.

So what do these uses of present or future tenses in narratives tell us about culturally specific representations of time? Generally, narrative use of tenses is a device designed to produce special stylistic effects. Tense per se may not always be crucial to understand temporal structures in narratives. Once past location has been established, maybe in the introduction to a story, what often matters most is the temporal location of events *relative* to each other. Languages exploit all sorts of possibilities. Example 9 illustrates the use of both narrative present and future to vividly recount past events in French:

9. *En 1789, le peuple de Paris prend (PRESENT) la Bastille. La garnison a résisté (PRESENT PERFECT) pendant une heure et demie. La foule massacrera (FUTURE) le gouverneur sur le chemin de l'hôtel de ville.*⁷²
“In 1789 the people of Paris take the Bastille. The garrison *has resisted* for an hour and a half. The crowd *will murder* the governor on the way to the town hall.”

Such complex uses of tenses are stylistic opportunities available to (almost) any language and as such cannot be read as evidence of culturally specific conceptions of time. It is conceivable that such uses in mythical narratives depicting ancient times in Australian Indigenous languages may symbolically convey that past events are still part of the present. Such stylistic practices could then be interpreted as a form of cultural symbol (in the sense discussed in the first section of this chapter), where time is represented as nonlinear for stylistic purposes. However, reporting past events as if they were occurring now is a common strategy in storytelling across languages and cultures, and it is employed to bring vividness to a story and to provide structure, especially to oral discourse.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined what properties of Australian Indigenous languages can tell us about their speakers' culturally specific conceptions of time, in circular instead of linear time or a blurred distinction

between past and present. At the level of day-to-day observation, in our experience, behaviors and activities among the Australian Indigenous communities we are familiar with are carried out on the assumption of a linear succession between past and present. Some representations of time as circular or continuous emerge at the level of religious concepts such as *jukurrpa* or Dreamtime, associated ideals of continuity in history. Such cultural traits can invite symbolic representations of time as circular; however, circular or continuous cultural motives are also attested in Western culture and elsewhere.

Linguistically speaking, Australian Indigenous languages seem to use metaphors for time in ways that are comparable to many languages across the world. From the little linguists currently know, the grammatical categories that express temporal concepts in Indigenous languages of Australia appear to exhibit great diversity, and this reflects the diversity found more generally in the world's languages. Some Australian languages may indeed be grammatically tenseless. If this is really the case, it does not imply that their speakers have a different conception of time. Instead, recent research into tense and aspect has shown how in so-called tenseless languages, semantics and pragmatics share the burden of producing linguistic meaning: what is explicit in the grammar or vocabulary of one language may be implicit or inferable in another. Either way, speakers of all languages can express temporal reference, regardless of whether the language has tense or how many tenses their grammar features. In other words, grammatical tense systems do not offer a window onto speakers' conceptual representations of time.

Beyond grammatical categories and systems, we also examined discourse uses of temporal expressions in narratives told by speakers of some Australian Indigenous languages. We argued that the narrative tools used by these speakers are attested in other languages across the world and are compatible with linear representations of time.

Clearly, the study of how time is represented in different languages reveals a fascinating diversity. It is tempting to magnify differences and see them as influencing or reflecting the way speakers think. A correlation in the fact that people who speak different languages belong to different cultures does not imply that there is causation. At the same time, the

grammars of some languages may highlight certain aspects of meaning that other languages leave implicit. The extent to which this may affect speakers' views of the world is still open to debate. Notwithstanding *some* cultural specificity, the idea that Indigenous Australians inhabit time in ways that are *incommensurable* with other experiences of time, we suggest, owes more to romantic visions of Indigenous cultures than to evidence within Australian languages.

NOTES

1. Grégoire, *Géographie générale illustrée* (translated by the authors).
2. Stanner, "Dreaming"; Wolfe, "On Being Woken Up."
3. Janca and Bullen, "Aboriginal Concept of Time"; Walker, "Eternity Now."
4. Janca and Bullen, "Aboriginal Concept of Time"; Musharbash, "Boredom, Time and Modernity."
5. Dixon, *Languages of Australia*, 283; Gaby, "Thaayorre Think of Time," 3; Musharbash, "Boredom, Time and Modernity."
6. See also chapters 5 and 10 in this volume.
7. Dalabon, Rembarrnga, and Bininj Kun-wok, all from the Gunwinyguan family (non-Pama-Nyungan). Such words are available in Kriol, a creole now spoken in many inland Arnhem Land communities. However, measuring time is not a prominent practice among Kriol speakers either.
8. Poirier, *World of Relationships*, 59.
9. Janca and Bullen, "Aboriginal Concept of Time."
10. Gaby, "Thaayorre Think of Time," 3.
11. The term Dreaming is also found, albeit less frequently. To my knowledge, the distinction between the two is not clearly established. In Kriol, *drimin* refers to totemic birth places. See Austin, "Temporal Reference," 146; Janca and Bullen, "Aboriginal Concept of Time," 40.
12. Elkin, *Australian Aborigines*; Meggitt, *Desert People*; Spencer and Gillen, *Native Tribes*; Stanner, "Dreaming." For a detailed history, see Wolfe, "On Being Woken Up."
13. Goddard and Wierzbicka, "What Does Jukurrpa Mean?"; Green, "Altyerre Story"; Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*.
14. See, for example, Dousset, *Australian Aboriginal Kinship*, 109; Dobson and Henderson, *Anpernrrentye*.
15. Dousset, "De l'humanisation."
16. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*. See also chapter 11 in this volume.
17. Kövecses, *Metaphor*; Lakoff, *Women, Fire*; Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

18. Evans, *Structure of Time*; Haspelmath, *From Space to Time*; Traugott, "On the Expression."
19. Gaby, "Thaayorre Think of Time." But see chapter 5 in this volume for examples of spatial demonstratives used to indicate temporal reference. Example is from "A Culturally Informed Corpus of Dalabon," Endangered Language Archive, recording #20110519b_001_lb_nd 024, <https://www.elararchive.org/dk0071/#:~:text=This%20corpus%20served%20as%20a,diminutives%2C%20interjections%2C%20prosody>.
20. Abbreviations and symbols used in the examples: BEN = Benefactive; CL = classifier; DEM = demonstrative (general, distance neutral); DS = different subject clitic; FUT = future tense; GIVEN = NP referent given/accessible; IPFV = (past) imperfective; LOC = locative; LOC.ALL = allative (on locational nominals); NEG = negation; NOM = nominative; ORIG = origin case, source, or cause; PASS = passive; PL = plural; POT = potential/future; PPFV = past perfective; PROPR = proprietive; PRS = present tense; PST = past tense; PURPss = purposive same subject; R = realis mood; RESTR = restrictive; SEQ = sequential clitic; sg or SG = singular; yk = "you know" clitic; 3 = third person; 13 = exclusive first person; \ = falling prosodic contour; > = separates glosses for actor and undergoer in inflecting verb pronominal prefixes.
21. Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*.
22. Lucy, *Language Diversity and Thought*.
23. However, Wik has such a word; see chapter 10 in this volume.
24. Ponsonnet, "Emotion Nouns."
25. Malt et al., "Do Words Reveal Concepts?" The four languages were English, Spanish, Dutch, and Japanese.
26. Levinson, *Space in Language*.
27. Palmer et al., "How Does the Environment?"
28. Slobin, "From 'Thought and Language.'"
29. Bowerman and Choi, "Space under Construction."
30. Papafragou, Massey, and Gleitman, "When English Proposes."
31. Talmy, "Semantics and Syntax."
32. Papafragou, Massey, and Gleitman, "When English Proposes."
33. Austin, "Temporal Reference."
34. Austin, "Temporal Reference," 146.
35. For example, Comrie, *Tense*. This traditional definition is a simplification, as in many languages grammatical affixes on verbs combine temporal, aspectual, and modal information. See the definitions of aspect and modality below.
36. Klein, *Time in Language*.
37. Klein, *Time in Language*, 3.
38. Austin, "Temporal Reference."

39. Comrie, *Tense*.
40. Austin, "Temporal Reference," 157.
41. Dench, *Martuthunira*.
42. We ignore here the many modal meanings of "would" to confine the discussion to the relative nature of tenses. Futures more generally are viewed by many as conveying modality. Simply put, modality has to do with the expression of (im) possibility and (un)certainty; however, a discussion of this meaning category would go beyond the scope of this chapter.
43. Hatav, "Bound Tenses."
44. Austin, "Temporal Reference," 156.
45. Bani and Klokeid, *Papers*.
46. Botne, "Remoteness Distinctions"; Cable, "Beyond the Past"; Foley, *Papuan Languages*.
47. Comrie, *Tense*, 45, 49; Austin, "Temporal Reference" 156.
48. Matthewson, "Temporal Semantics."
49. DeCaen, "Tenseless Languages," 41.
50. Lin, "Temporal Reference"; Bohnemeyer, *Grammar of Time Reference*; Bittner, "Future Discourse"; Ngo, "Translation."
51. Comrie, *Aspect*, 4.
52. Smith, *Parameter of Aspect*.
53. Klein, *Time in Language*.
54. By "verb phrases" we mean both simple lexical verbs, such as "walk," and more complex verbal expressions, such as "build a house."
55. For example, Smith, *Parameter of Aspect*; Smith, "Aspectual Entities and Tense"; Kamp and Reyle, *From Discourse to Logic*; Klein, *Time in Language*; Kamp, Genabith, and Reyle, "Discourse Representation Theory."
56. Smith and Erbaugh, "Temporal Interpretation"; Smith, "Aspectual Entities and Tense." These generalizations only partly account for some of the phenomena. For critical discussion, see, e.g., Tonhauser, "Cross Linguistic Temporal Reference."
57. Lin, "Temporal Reference," 262–63; see also Tonhauser, "Cross Linguistic Temporal Reference," 142.
58. Asher and Lascarides, *Logics of Conversation*.
59. Grice, "Logic and Conversation."
60. Ritz, Dench, and Caudal, "Now or Then?"; Dench, *Martuthunira*; Ritz and Schultze-Berndt, "Time for a Change?"; Browne, "Contrast and Retroactive Implicatures."
61. Ritz and Schultze-Berndt, "Time for a Change?," 8.
62. Ritz and Schultze-Berndt, "Time for a Change?," 5.
63. For more detail, see Ritz and Schultze-Berndt, "Time for a Change?"
64. Dench, *Martuthunira*, 184 (emphasis added).
65. Ritz, Dench, and Caudal, "Now or Then?," 41 (emphasis added).

66. Altshuler, *Events, States and Times*, 37.
67. Hunter, “Now.”
68. Stirling, “Tense/Aspect Shifting.”
69. Levey, “Tense Variation,” 140.
70. Ritz and Dench, “Le futur en Martuthunira.”
71. Dench, *Martuthunira*, 291.
72. Example from Wikipédia, “Présent Historique,” last modified November 11, 2019, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pr%C3%A9sent_historique (translated by the authors).

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PART 3

Transforming Times

Innovation, Continuity, and the Punctuated Temporality of Archaeological Narratives

Catherine J. Frieman

Thinking like an archaeologist means, at least in part, thinking in time. From our first days as students we are taught to order, to sequence, to ask which is oldest and which is more recent. We learn myriad methods for developing our temporal models, from the basic stratigraphic principle that the layers farthest from the surface are the oldest to the complex scientific and statistical underpinnings of isotopic dating. And as we become professionals, we in turn teach the next generation of students to create and identify patterns in the vast complexity of archaeological assemblages, with time and periodization as central organizing principles. We train them to arrange their mental maps in a line from oldest to newest, to arrange the objects they study in the same way, and to speak in standard disciplinary terms about the passage and order of time.

However, to tell stories from the fragmented and incomplete archaeological record, we also learn to create order from the material remains past people left behind. These are neither intact nor necessarily representative of the full suite of people, lived experiences, ways of life, cosmologies, enterprises, or social structures that existed at any given time and place in the past. We archaeologists are thus both freed and constrained in our tellings of the past—freed in that we do not rely on texts written by the few about the many and constrained in that our stories are nonetheless cobbled together from small fragments representing only a minuscule

portion of the richly textured material world created and experienced by those past people whose stories we try to tell.¹

Yet following archaeologist Gavin Lucas, our conception and models of what he calls “archaeological time” are not neutral but are interpretative instruments.² These are premised on specific social models of change and progress that formed part of the larger nineteenth-century intellectual climate out of which the discipline was born.³ Deploying these uncritically leads us to construct totalizing narratives that assume universal temporalities, leading to a homogenous and normative view of the archaeological record. That is, we build models that assume time passes in only one way (i.e., the one modeled in our chronologies), and in projecting this onto the global past of all peoples and all periods, we erase other ways of understanding or experiencing the passage of time.⁴ Different conceptual models—for example, the *Annales* school of history and knowledge systems such as those created and experienced by non-European people—assume different temporalities, leading to distinctly different ways of telling stories about the past, the present, and the connections between the two.⁵

In this chapter I explore the patterns of temporality read onto the past by archaeologists, through the lens of my own ongoing research into technological change and innovation.⁶ I argue that conceptions of technological change and innovation have profoundly influenced our understanding of the temporality of the archaeological record. I start with a brief discussion of the history of archaeological chronologies and their invention in order to focus on the dominant position technology plays in “archaeological time” and particularly the outsize importance given to perceived innovations. I then explore the nature of technological change and innovation to challenge the assumed progressive, positivist models of change over time. Finally, I address the ways that an understanding of innovation informed by readings of technology developed within the broad and interdisciplinary field of science and technology studies can affect our ability to order and arrange the past—making time for the people and experiences all too frequently glossed over in most archaeological narratives.

Time is central to both the narratives archaeologists build and the very development of our discipline. Creating order from the sheer mess and complexity of the archaeological record was a collective goal of most early archaeologists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷ To do so they invented methods of excavation and interpretation that, despite over a century of scientific and technical development, remain core elements of our conceptualization and reconstruction of past worlds.

The “three age system,” in which the archaeological material of the preliterate world is ordered into a sequence of Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, first proposed by the Danish national museum curator C. J. Thomsen in the 1820s, is one of these.⁸ Thomsen faced the struggle of finding meaning within the assembled mass of antiquarian collections held by the newly founded Danish National Museum so that he could display them. He looked to ongoing excavations and proposed that those artifacts found together could be deemed contemporary. Based on his studies he developed a chronological framework that he used to order the museum’s collection, allowing visitors to move from the age of stone tools to the age of bronze tools to the age of iron tools.⁹ His student J. J. Worsaae, British antiquarians John Lubbock and Daniel Wilson, and others later refined his system.¹⁰

A key concern of nineteenth-century archaeology, the period when the discipline was becoming formalized, was to impose chronological order on the past. This attention to order led, for example, Gen. Augustus Lane Fox Pitt Rivers to introduce the complete mapping of carefully laid-out, linear, and straight-sided trenches. This sort of systematic excavation and recording improved the quality of archaeological data by both allowing the exact location of important finds and features to be pinpointed and normalizing vertical records of archaeological deposits, leading to increased identification of stratigraphic order and sealed contexts. Rooted in geological principles, the oldest layers or strata of deposits are assumed to be the lowest in any sequence, with more recent deposits accumulating closer to the surface. Consequently, archaeologists developed relative sequences of excavated material based on the stratigraphic

layers from which these were recovered. Similarly, a sealed context—one that could be shown never to have been interfered with since its deposition—demonstrates that all the materials included within it were in circulation contemporaneously. Archaeologists looking for further means to interpret unsealed or unstratified material also invented new methods of artifact classification premised on the evolutionary principle that small changes in form or technology could indicate change over time, allowing otherwise undatable sites or materials to at least be ordered sequentially.

These relative chronologies provided sequential orderings of material that could be applied and compared across Europe, but the Swedish royal antiquary Oscar Montelius suggested they could be made absolute—that is, given calendrical years.¹¹ He did this by comparing sealed Bronze Age contexts with shared material culture (e.g., the same type of sword or broach or spearhead) southward from Sweden until he directly connected contexts to parts of the world with written documentation and calendars for this period. Specifically, he sought to tie the material culture in sealed contexts from Bronze Age Europe to the dated lists of ancient Egyptian pharaohs. In doing so he proposed a model of the Bronze Age in Scandinavia broken into six phases, each about two hundred years long and all placed into measurable calendrical time. Although complex and esoteric in its methods, Montelius's approach has been vindicated by scientific analyses: based on the latest radiocarbon chronologies his dates are no more than fifty years different from what scientific dating of these sealed contexts would tell us.¹²

Indeed, more and more precise dating methods continue to be developed. Radiocarbon dating alone has gone through at least four major phases of change, each allowing greater precision in dating achieved from smaller samples.¹³ While radiocarbon dating is probably the best known of the scientific (or absolute) dating techniques, its accuracy is limited by the approximately forty-five-thousand-year half-life of carbon—that is, it does not work for material older than forty-five thousand years. Therefore, a variety of techniques have been developed to study the chronology of the Pleistocene.¹⁴ These include geological studies of volcanic tephra indicating moments of climatic upheaval in deep

prehistory, uranium-thorium dating of rock art suggesting a Neanderthal origin, and optically stimulated luminescence dating used for sediments in Australian rock shelters, indicating that people were occupying this continent over sixty thousand years ago.¹⁵ The affordances and limitations of these various methods have been a major feature of the debate over the Pleistocene occupation of North and South America.¹⁶ My point here is that chronology is a fundamental principle of archaeology, tied to its emergence as a discipline and leading directly to the development of core archaeological methods—in the field, in the museum, and in the laboratory. Moreover, dating sites and technologies and, above all, finding surprisingly old dates or the earliest dated examples of a given tool, raw material, or technological practice are seen as goals in their own right and are often the subject of lurid media coverage.¹⁷

Of course, these ideas about chronology and technological change over time did not emerge in a vacuum. They formed part of a rich, complex, and in today's terms deeply interdisciplinary conversation largely in Europe and America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries about the history and nature of humanity. In particular, archaeologists and antiquarians attempting to order the past into a logical chronology were influenced by evolutionary paradigms.¹⁸ So they assumed technology—like species and social organization—became more sophisticated and complex over time. The stone-bronze-iron sequence was not just observable but was rational, expected, and inescapable.

Early anthropologists, such as E. B. Tylor and Lewis H. Morgan, used these models to compare the technologies and ways of life of Indigenous and non-European peoples with those of the ancient peoples of Europe whose stone axes and bronze swords filled the glass cases of museums.¹⁹ They proposed models of social evolution that ranked social organizations (ancient and modern) from most to least simple: in Morgan's model (see table 10), from "Lower Savagery" to "Modern Civilization," where the latter looks suspiciously like Victorian England. These stages were based not only on political structure or social organization but also on subsistence practices and levels of technological development. That is, they were determined by perceived sequences of innovation. Moreover, like the sequential Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, these evolutionary

Table 10. Tylor’s and Morgan’s evolutionary models of social and technological development set against the standard European archaeological periodization developed contemporaneously

Tylor	Morgan		
Evolutionary stages	Evolutionary stages	Level of technological development	Archaeological ages
Savagery	Lower Savagery	Fruits and nuts, speech	Paleolithic
	Middle Savagery	Fishing and gathering, use of fire	
	Upper Savagery	Hunting and gathering, bow and arrow, spear	
Barbarism	Lower Barbarism	Horticulture, pottery	Neolithic
	Middle Barbarism	Animal domestication (Eurasia), maize cultivation (Americas), irrigation, bronze smithing	
	Upper Barbarism	Cereal cultivation, iron smelting, wheeled vehicles, potter’s wheel, loom weaving, poetry	
Civilization	Ancient Civilization	Iron-pointed plows, animal traction, coinage, hieroglyphic and phonetic alphabet, writing, cities	Iron Age/ Medieval era
	Modern Civilization	Telegraph, power loom, steam engines, printing, gunpowder, photography, science, democracy	Post-Medieval era

stages of politico-technological development were considered linear and progressive. One could not “skip” stages. Progress or technological advancement (presumed to be synonymous) was construed as a natural state of existence: inevitable.²⁰

These models foregrounded the significance not merely of new raw materials, such as clay or iron, but also of specific technological practices, including animal domestication, horticulture, irrigation, writing, and smithing. The models were premised on the idea that certain tools or techno-systems (i.e., forms of agriculture) could be proxies for social organization. Changes in techno-systems were presumed to be directly correlated both to social changes and to chronological changes.

The models of conjoined technological and social development should be understood as having a recursive relationship with some of the most damaging intellectual underpinnings of European colonialism affecting Indigenous and colonized peoples. Archaeologists Sandra Montón-Subías and Almudena Hernando argue that the historical and archaeological discourse in particular privileges *change* (both social and technological) over continuity because of its origins in a particularly Eurocentric and masculine strand of Enlightenment thinking in which change and progress are the hallmarks of “civilization.”²¹ This discourse, having developed within the context of the European colonial expansion, explicitly positioned “dynamic” European societies as more advanced, valuable, and moral than unchanging, stable, or “backward” non-European societies.²² Further, the perceived technological stagnation of non-European peoples was among the moral underpinnings used to justify hegemonic colonial expansion of Europeans into the rest of the world during the post-medieval period.²³ Thus models of social and temporal change foundational to archaeology and anthropology both reflected and reasserted the validity of these racist and colonialist modes of thought.

At the very end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth archaeology and anthropology saw a large-scale rejection of evolutionary principles.²⁴ Archaeologists developed historical methods and models with an emphasis on identifying the people who made the material record rather than simply sequencing objects. Yet I argue that the idea that innovation and chronological change were married remained

implicit even within these new approaches. Having spent decades accumulating archaeological materials and carefully ordering them into chronological sequences, archaeologists began looking for further patterns in their data, particularly as regional patterning began to become evident. First formalized by German and Scandinavia archaeologists as *Siedlungsarchäologie*, or “settlement archaeology,” in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, this school of archaeology attempted to draw straight lines from historically known ethnic groups to prehistoric peoples, mapping their migrations and examining their development through the study of discrete material culture assemblages. The basic unit of analysis for these “culture historians” was the *Kulturgruppe* or *Kultur*, normative entities represented by temporally and spatially bound clusters of similar material culture and thought to represent ethnic groups or tribal entities. Australian archaeologist V. G. Childe is responsible for introducing the phrase “archaeological culture” into English in 1925 and described it more explicitly in 1929 as “certain types of remains—pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites, house forms—constantly recurring together.”²⁵

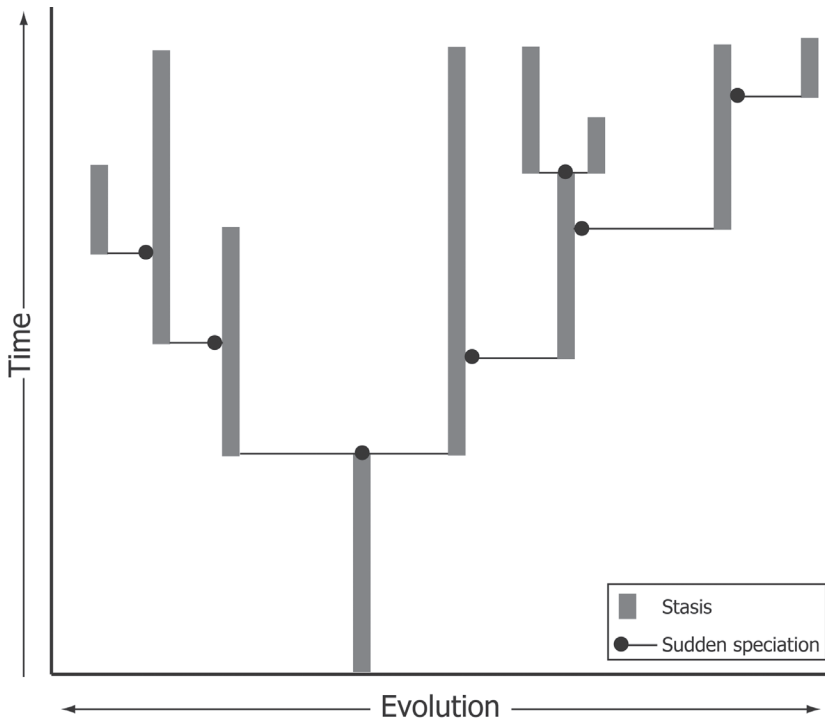
In Childe’s influential models innovation was of crucial importance. A committed Marxist, Childe proposed that the invention and adoption of agriculture, for example, represented a “revolution” in the Marxian sense: a core shift in both the mode and the relations of production, with attendant effects to the cultural and economic superstructure.²⁶ However, Childe—like most of his contemporaries—viewed innovation as rare and believed that most revolutionary ideas were not generated within a given social group but were introduced from outside. Within the culture-historical approach, not only were ethnic groups deemed to be bounded—there was no space for multiple, conflicted, or fluid identities here—but they were also supposed to be deeply conservative and opposed to change. The intellectual framework underpinning the culture-historical method is premised on the belief that ancient cultures were internally homogenous over long stretches of time and resistant to change from inside.²⁷ Instead, new ideas, technologies, and ways of life derived from external stimuli such as new people (with new technology) *migrating* into an area or novel ideas *diffusing* in from neighboring

regions.²⁸ Since archaeological cultures were (and are) defined largely by their technological practices and material culture, innovation, then, also meant culture change—and perhaps also population change.

PUNCTUATED INNOVATION?

The assumption that innovation—largely in the form of technological change—is a key inflection point in past society that offers privileged insight into the archaeological record has left some interesting traces in our narratives. In the 1970s biologists Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge proposed that evolution was not a gradual or slow process of change over time, but should instead be conceived of as punctuated: long periods of biological stability (equilibrium) were disrupted by rare bursts of evolutionary change (fig. 15).²⁹ While this model has received criticism since its introduction, it has been widely adopted across the biological sciences and applied as an analogy in nonscience disciplines, including organizational studies, political science, and economics.³⁰ Here I propose that the concept of “punctuated equilibrium” serves as a valuable metaphor for the way that innovation and temporality intersect in archaeological narratives.

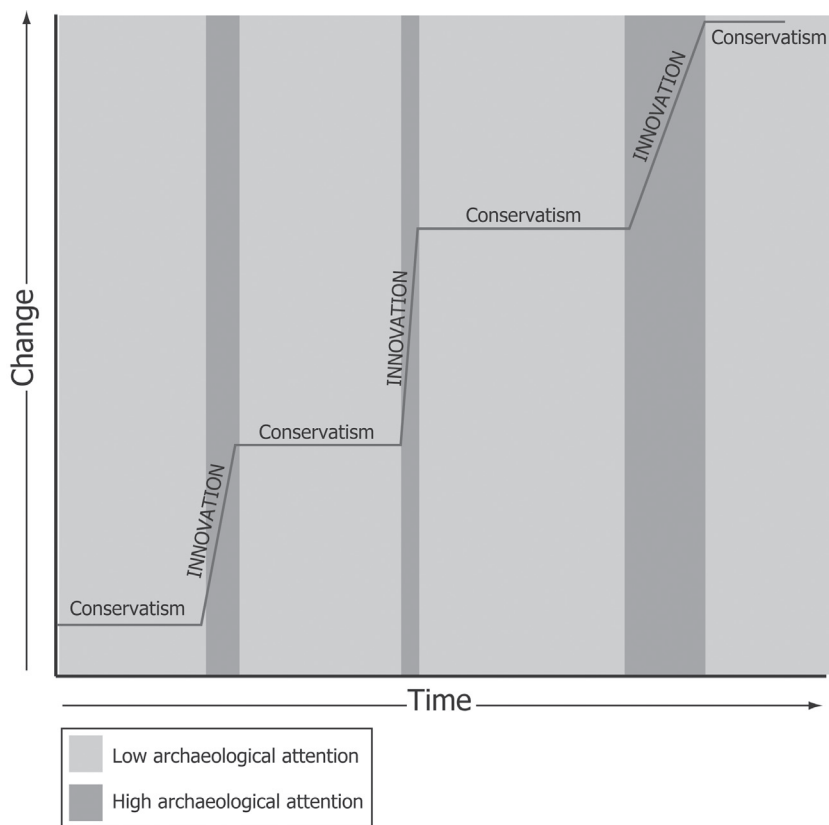
The presupposition of stability and traditionalism of the small-scale societies that characterized much of human history has gone largely unchallenged. Archaeological discourse often assumes the past was innately conservative.³¹ As a consequence, archaeological attention to the slow, unchanging passage of centuries has been minimal. As Montón-Subías and Hernando delineate, archaeology as a discipline is oriented around a paradigm of change, a result of the discipline’s Eurocentric and Enlightenment origins.³² Thus periods of rapid or obvious change—the beginnings of agriculture, the earliest metal ages, the emergence of urbanism—have received intense and perhaps even outsize attention compared with the apparently less dynamic periods during which most people lived. Therefore, archaeological time has become “punctuated” through the application of change-oriented epistemologies. Archaeologists have treated some very narrow periods as richer than other, longer stretches of years and millennia. This has an impact on the data available, as these apparently more innovative phases become interpretatively



F15. An evolutionary tree under punctuated equilibrium. Major evolutionary change takes place in short periods of time, leading to a fossil record characterized by revolution and stasis, rather than gradually evolving species.

thicker because archaeological attention focuses on them and more data accrues (fig. 16).

Yet decades of research into the social context of innovative activity and the diffusion of innovations makes clear that innovations—whether technological or social—do not just happen. Instead, they develop gradually and spread from person to person, community to community, along established lines of communication, whether these are infrastructural, such as telephone networks or roads; geographic, like mountain passes or rivers; or social, such as networks of kin or trading partners.³³ Unlike genetic changes, innovations are not random or spontaneous mutations but emerge from ongoing, dynamic human interactions—with each other, with specific raw materials, with known technologies, with embodied



F16. A model of the punctuated conception of technological change over time showing the disparity between thickly interpreted narrow phases deemed innovative and thinly interpreted wide phases deemed conservative.

experiences of technological practices. This research reveals that the impulse to innovate or to accept an innovation is socially conditioned, complex, and largely nonlinear. Moreover, this impulse is intensely human, with each choice to adopt an innovation emerging from an ongoing and preexisting process of talking, learning, and testing. Innovations are also regularly rejected. This happens not just on functional grounds but sometimes for seemingly arbitrary reasons that are difficult to assess, being grounded firmly in cultural attitudes toward the newly altered practices, technologies, or ideas.³⁴ Archaeologists face considerable

challenges in applying this understanding of innovation to the past, as the archaeological record is fragmented and incomplete, often lacking the voices of those people who chose to reject or adopt innovations. Furthermore, because of the scarcity of data, we generally lack evidence for the early stages of innovation adoption.³⁵ Hence archaeologists tend to focus on post hoc identification of already successfully adopted innovations rather than think about their messy origin stories.

And mess is probably the best way to characterize our relationships with technology. Building on research developed within the constructivist school of history of technology and science and technology studies, I argue that new technologies should not be thought of as having a single moment of creation or linear pattern of development.³⁶ Instead, innovations are best understood as multiply constructed by various constituencies—individuals, groups, market forces, social categories of use or value, and so on—each with different problems or needs that they see the technology addressing. Thus evolutionary models of technological development—relying as they do on conceptions of progress, linear development, and random mutation—are rarely accurate or useful. Instead they tend to privilege post hoc assessments of functionality or value. As an example of this, economic historian Joel Mokyr asserts that punctuated equilibrium models can serve as an explanatory analogy to understand technological change, illustrating his case with the example of the European Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which he characterizes as a “sudden outburst.”³⁷ Yet Maxine Berg, among others, maintains that the values and desires that drove the Industrial Revolution can be found not in the laboratory of isolated geniuses building prototype steam engines but in the emerging fashion trends of the eighteenth century.³⁸ The desire for novel trinkets, buttons, and ornaments led to a proliferation of new communication networks, processes for acquiring and using new raw materials, manufacturing practices, and forms of industrial organization and specialization, all of which were bound up in the later developments in heavy industry.

Sociologists Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker famously modeled the nonlinearity of the innovation process through an examination of the development of the safety bicycle—that is, the modern bicycle we use

today.³⁹ Following their discussion, the traditional linear model of bicycle development draws lines of direct “familial” connection between forms of the bicycle that appear post hoc to have generated subsequent models: from the “boneshaker” with its asymmetrical wheels to the high-wheeled Penny Farthing, which improved shock absorption, to Lawson’s bicyclette with its chain-driven rear wheel to the low-wheeled, chain-driven safety bicycles we now ride. However, while this works on paper, it does not match reality—for example, Lawson’s bicyclette, widely understood to be a direct precursor of the safety bicycle, was a commercial failure.

Instead Pinch and Bijker argue against linearity by positioning innovation adoption as the product of negotiation between individuals and groups with competing problems, desires, and ideas about what technological development could serve as a solution. So, for example, they suggest that the bicycle, during its long phase of development in the nineteenth century, meant different things to different groups, such as early cycling enthusiasts and the “anti-cyclists” who jeered and threw stones at them. The bicycle’s form then responded to problems posed by these different groups. So, for example, daring men wanting to ride or race high wheelers, which traveled very fast because of the size of their front wheels, posed different problems to bicycle designers than women cyclists, who were socially required to wear capacious garments that made high-wheeled forms hard to ride. Eventually, emerging social and technological solutions to such problems are developed that allow consensus to be reached. In this case lower-wheeled bicycles that women could ride in skirts were produced, but the period also saw active attempts to change social mores and dress conventions, leading to more acceptance for women wearing trousers.

Stepping back from a single specific case study, we can outline this complex process more broadly. Innovation happens at several geographic and spatial scales: that of the individual’s momentary choice to try or reject a novel thing or idea; that of her experiences with it during repeated trials; that of her family or nearby community as they encounter the innovation through her; that of her community as they become habituated to the innovation or as conflict emerges over whether to accept it more widely; that of the wider region as others encounter and grapple

with the innovation; that of the generation of people who recognize as innovation as novel but are far enough removed from its introduction to have already become habituated to it; that of the supraregion where patterns of innovation adoption and rejection can be mapped; and that of multiple successive generations who continue to use or eventually discard the innovation. All but the last of these are effectively invisible to archaeologists working on regions and periods without written or oral histories—or to put it another way, by the time an innovation is archaeologically visible, it is likely to be well on its way to widespread adoption.

So the model of technological innovation is better understood as a messy mishmash of socially significant problems and solutions alongside technical and technological developments. Major social categories, such as gender and the political and social worlds in which these are negotiated, are as significant as (or perhaps even more significant than) apparent technological functionality or the opinions and decisions of single inventors or entrepreneurs. Certainly, following David Gooding's social model of experimentation within the invention process, the linear narratives of discovery and invention that suffuse popular discourse on technological change are not just misleading but are also "predigested and largely symbolic" stories, serving less to illuminate how new technologies are developed than to promote the myth of singular genius inventors, isolated from their peers and standing apart from history.⁴⁰ Punctuation, then, is imposed by later observers rather than innate.

MAKING TIME

Archaeologists' and anthropologists' use of analogy between ancient Europeans and non-European people shaped the emerging understanding of Europe's past societies through the nineteenth century. This image was heavily colored by racist and colonialist attitudes, grounded in and justified by the evolutionary framework, which positioned these non-Western peoples and their ways of life as stable and backward, deeply conservative, and unchanging.⁴¹ These stereotypes unfortunately linger in the present.

Emma Kowal, building on work by Johannes Fabian, asserts that the eternal present of “anthropological time” has contributed to an image of Indigenous Australians as stable, static, and changeless—not just not modern but almost antimodern. She emphasizes how the frequent description of Indigenous Australian society as “the oldest living culture on Earth”—a concept drawing heavily on archaeological data—serves to flatten time in the popular discourse, creating an image of Aboriginal culture as unchanged from sixty thousand years ago until the present.⁴² In other words, discourse privileges the temporal terminology “oldest,” eliding the dynamic descriptor “living.”⁴³ This is similar to First Nations archaeologist Michael Wilcox’s critique of what he terms “terminal narratives,” narratives of colonization and change that emphasize the pastness of First Nations people rather than their dynamism and persistence, particularly regarding colonial invasions and the introduction of exogenous technologies and materials.⁴⁴

Shifting our perspective about innovation also shifts our ability to assess and examine ancient peoples, technologies, and ways of life, separate from value-laden, sociotechnical chronological schema. If, as I have maintained, innovations are not momentary or punctuated, but instead emerge from and exist within complex and temporally deep social and personal relationships—if we innovate on a curve and not in a burst—then no time is unchanging and no people are truly resistant to innovation. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the practice of remaining “traditional” is itself a highly dynamic and innovative process.⁴⁵ Conservatism enfolds innovation. This leads me to suggest that we archaeologists have let old assumptions about technology structure our chronologies for too long. Our methodologies—which already bring together scientific analyses of many different sorts, ethnographic observations, social theory, historical and oral narratives, and a wide range of excavation techniques—demonstrate our ability to assimilate and make meaning through complexity, so accepting a more complicated model of innovation should not add undue difficulty. We must recognize that a given innovation does not exist within a single technological or social domain but inevitably crosses several—from gendered relations to power

hierarchies to local or regional traditions of use and production—each of which has its own distinct history of development and practice.⁴⁶

Working across temporal and spatial scales, weaving together narratives drawn from multiple pieces of social and technological data will allow us to build thicker stories of the past—stories that do not hyperfocus on moments of perceived change. For example, a single glass bead, a bead maker's workshop, new ornament styles that illustrate changing tastes in fashion or attire, and large-scale patterns of diffusion of glass beads and other trinkets all give us insight into elements of past technological knowledge, practice, economic organization, and social structure, but together they paint a picture of a human and humanized world in which things are not alienated from human relationships and technology is not isolated from society. Thus not only are we able to foreground the local and small-scale decisions (or at least their material residue) that shape the spread of innovations, but we also smooth the flow of time, which loses its distinctive (and misleading) punctuated character. The challenge lies in allowing our lines of evidence to contradict each other, as they inevitably do when we combine and compare fragmented data at different scales of analysis. These contradictions, like the similarities, add texture to our stories of the past and push back against normative, totalizing narratives.

One of the great challenges of being an archaeologist is that we essentially invent the past by weaving stories around bits of broken rubbish. In this chapter I have argued that evolutionary metaphors embedded in our chronological systems have led us to privilege too strong a focus on technological innovation as a proxy for social change and left us with a punctuated view of the ancient past. Instead of letting new technologies and practices draw our attention—effectively leaving most of human history, life, and practice out of our narratives—we should embrace a more complex understanding of innovation and use that to challenge our ideas of change, tradition, and temporality. We can and should make time to study the phases between the “revolutions,” since these are where those innovations were birthed, debated, and eventually adopted (or sometimes not).

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NOTES

1. Though we do not rely on texts written by the few about the many, we will certainly consult them when available. There is a long and rich history of research into text-aided and historical archaeology in which texts form an intrinsic and deeply valued part of the data set through which the past is analyzed. See, for example, Andr  n, *Between Artifacts and Texts*; Cipolla, "Textual Artifacts, Artifactual Texts"; Funari, Hall, and Jones, *Historical Archaeology*; Moreland, *Archaeology and Text*; Little, *Text-Aided Archaeology*; Voss, "Image, Text, Object." The clear difference between archaeology and history in these contexts is our particular attentiveness to the material record, which can offer unique insight into the daily lives and mundane lived experiences of those individuals who rarely wrote their own stories—children, the poor, slaves, women, and colonized peoples. See, for example, Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*; Hall, "Subaltern Voices?"; Scott, *Those of Little Note*.
2. Lucas, *Archaeology of Time*, chap. 1.
3. There is a vast literature on this intellectual climate and the ways different conceptualizations of progress and evolution became entwined in a variety of emerging disciplines during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Clearly, it is a complex topic well beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice it to say the eighteenth and particularly nineteenth centuries saw considerable interest in an idea of progress that was intrinsically and semantically linked to advancement and amelioration, expressed through technological innovation, enmeshed in Christian epistemologies, and—invariably—instrumentalized to enact and justify colonial practices. See Adas, *Machines as the Measure*; Spadafora, *Idea of Progress*; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*; Voget, "Progress, Science, History."

4. For example, chapter 11 in this volume compares the variable temporalities experienced by Aboriginal people and European missionaries, with an emphasis on the contrast between an assumed normative European temporality and the experienced temporality of the Christian liturgy.
5. For examples of this within archaeology, in terms of both methods for chronology building and interpretations of past people's experiences of time, see Gosden and Lock, "Prehistoric Histories"; Bailey, "Time Perspectives, Palimpsests," as well as essays in Murray, *Time and Archaeology*.
6. Frieman, *Archaeology of Innovation*; Frieman, *Innovation and Imitation*.
7. Schnapp, *Discovery of the Past*; Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*.
8. Thomsen, *Leitfaden zur nordischen Alterthumskunde*.
9. Rowley-Conwy, *From Genesis to Prehistory*; Gräslund, *Birth of Prehistoric Chronology*; Heizer, "Background."
10. Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times*; Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*; Worsaae, *Primeval Antiquities of Denmark*.
11. Montelius, *Dating in the Bronze Age*.
12. Vandkilde, Rahbek, and Rasmussen, "Radiocarbon Dating."
13. Griffiths, "We're All Cultural Historians."
14. The geological period lasting from about 2.6 million years ago to about 12,000 years ago, during which *Homo sapiens* evolved and spread out over the world.
15. Clarkson et al., "Human Occupation"; Hoffmann et al., "U-Th Dating"; Lane et al., "Volcanic Ash."
16. For a few examples of this sprawling debate, see Bourgeon, Burke, and Higham, "Earliest Human Presence"; de Mello Araujo et al., "Revisiting Alice Boer"; Becerra-Valdivia and Higham "Timing and Effect." For a discussion of this period and data from the perspective of a First Nations archaeologist, see Steeves, *Indigenous Paleolithic*.
17. For example, Hiscock et al., "World's Earliest Ground-Edge Axe."
18. van Wyhe, "Descent of Words."
19. Morgan, *Ancient Society*; Tylor, *Researches*; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*. This sort of direct comparison, termed ethnographic analogy, remains an element of archaeological research, though one that has been—rightly, to my mind—strongly critiqued for reproducing colonialist and racist power structures by envisioning non-European peoples as underdeveloped "primitives" or evolutionary throwbacks disconnected from modernity and taking their knowledge, technological systems, and social structure as valuable only insofar as they could be used to explain European pasts. Stahl, "Concepts of Time." For a broad discussion of the relationship between anthropology and archaeology, see Gosden, *Anthropology and Archaeology*, chaps. 2–4. For more nuanced discussions of ethnographic analogy within contemporary archaeology, see

- McNiven, "Ethnoarchaeology, Epistemology, Ethics"; Hamilakis, "Decolonial Archaeologies"; Spriggs, "Ethnographic Parallels."
20. Although both "stagnation" and "degeneracy" were also widely discussed and debated, as can be seen in Tylor's discussion on the possibility of degeneracy—that is, a decline in development leading to a culture or people dropping from civilization to barbarism or barbarism to savagery. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1:40–48.
 21. Montón-Subías and Hernando, "Modern Colonialism."
 22. Díaz-Andreu García, *World History*; Trigger, "Alternative Archaeologies"; Kohl and Fawcett, *Nationalism, Politics*; Díaz-Andreu and Champion, *Nationalism and Archaeology*.
 23. Adas, *Machines as the Measure*.
 24. Trigger, *History of Archaeological Thought*, 217–33.
 25. Childe, *Dawn of European Civilization*; Childe, *Danube in Prehistory*, v–vi.
 26. Childe, *Man Makes Himself*.
 27. Watson, "Archaeology, Anthropology," 684.
 28. Vander Linden, "Tale of Two Countries," 26–27.
 29. Gould and Eldredge, "Punctuated Equilibria"; Eldredge and Gould, "Punctuated Equilibria."
 30. For two slightly diverging takes on this debate, see, for example, Lyne and Howe, "'Punctuated Equilibria'"; Geary, "Legacy of Punctuated Equilibrium." For examples of the latter, see Moky, "Punctuated Equilibria"; Goertz, *International Norms*; Loch and Huberman, "Punctuated-Equilibrium Model"; Gersick, "Revolutionary Change Theories"; Romanelli and Tushman, "Organizational Transformation."
 31. For example, Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East*, 119–21.
 32. Montón-Subías and Hernando, "Modern Colonialism."
 33. Rogers and Shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations*; Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*; Bijker, *Of Bicycles*; Wajcman, "Feminist Theories of Technology"; MacKenzie and Wajcman, *Social Shaping of Technology*; Hägerstrand, "Aspects"; Pfaffenberger, "Fetishised Objects"; Pfaffenberger, "Social Anthropology of Technology."
 34. Bauer, "Resistance to New Technology"; Thomas, Becerra, and Garrido, "Socio-Technical Dynamics."
 35. van der Leeuw, "Risk, Perception, Innovation," 304.
 36. See, for example, Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch, *Social Construction*; Latour, "Berlin Key"; Wajcman, "Feminist Theories of Technology"; MacKenzie and Wajcman, *Social Shaping of Technology*.
 37. Moky, "Punctuated Equilibria," 352.

38. Berg, "British Product Revolution"; Berg, "From Imitation to Invention." See also Bettoni, "Fashion, Tradition, and Innovation."
39. Pinch and Bijker, "Social Construction."
40. Gooding, "Mapping Experiment," 167.
41. Díaz-Andreu García, *World History*, 369.
42. Kowal, "Time, Indigeneity"; see also Fabian, *Time and the Work*.
43. Chapters 3 and 4 in this volume offer vivid examples of how music, song, and dance provide Aboriginal communities with both deep time connections and continuity with traditional social relations and relations to Country, as well as vibrant, dynamic practices for responding to the contemporary world.
44. Wilcox, *Pueblo Revolt*, 11–15; Panich, "Archaeologies of Persistence"; Panich, *Narratives of Persistence*; Wilcox, "Marketing Conquest."
45. I have developed an extensive discussion of this in Frieman, *Archaeology of Innovation*, chap. 6, where I discuss a variety of archaeological and anthropological case studies. For examples, see Frieman and May, "Navigating Contact"; Lepowsky, "Way of the Ancestors"; Panich, "Archaeologies of Persistence."
46. Hodder, *Entangled*.

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Across “Koori Time” and Space

John Maynard

Historically, Australian Aboriginal people like me, a Worimi man from New South Wales, were described as a people without history—a people living in a timeless land, forever trapped in the Stone Age.¹ But what is the truth of Aboriginal people and time? Today science has had a great impact on the understanding of our long connection to this continent, now said to be upward of sixty-five thousand years. In understanding time we are also recognized as carrying the longest memory known to humankind.² Of course, according to an Aboriginal sense of time, we have always been here. We came directly out of the Dreamtime of the creative ancestors and lived and cared for Country as it was on the very first day. This chapter focuses on an Aboriginal perspective and understanding of time and history.

Yuraki is an Aboriginal word from the region in which I grew up, Newcastle in New South Wales, 100 miles north of Sydney. The word *yuraki* was recorded by the missionary Lancelot Threlkeld nearly two hundred years ago as meaning “long ago,” “since,” “past,” or “history.” Biraban, a local fully initiated leader, saw the importance of ensuring that the local stories and language were recorded and thus formed a partnership with Threlkeld. The collection of cultural stories they documented in the 1820s and 1830s is like a historical time capsule revealing important

traditional aspects relating to Aboriginal Law, the environment, and the long history of the region.

An Aboriginal understanding of the past is widely recorded in Aboriginal vocabularies collected by European colonizers along with their explanations of the words. In his 1881 book Victorian pastoralist James Dawson noted *mull meea* as meaning “long time ago” and *nurrawilang* as “the past.” The Wiradjuri in western New South Wales had *ballanda* for “long time ago” or “in the beginning.” The Kamilaroi of northwestern New South Wales had *lambo* for “long ago.” We Worimi had a word that translates as “truly,” *marrung*, while the neighboring Awabakal had *tokol* and the Wiradjuri had *garrii* for “truth.” The Aboriginal world had a clearly defined path through Law of doing business a right or wrong way. Such widespread language recognition of the past shows that Aboriginal people retained and maintained a connection to our history as well as our own strong code of truth.

There is a distinct difference between Western and Aboriginal understandings of time measurement and the annual calendar. Our lives were governed by changing seasons, measured by the availability of differing food sources. The more recent Western approach to time has been shaped by the onset of the Industrial Revolution; everything is driven by productivity, schedules, profit, and time. Aboriginal people had a far more enjoyable approach to their working life, which consisted simply of getting enough food, meaning that the majority of time remained for dance, song, celebration, and family. My grandfather, the legendary Aboriginal activist Fred Maynard, stated powerfully in 1927 that the trade union movement was seeking the same conditions and management of time that had existed in our country before invasion, when “men only worked when necessary, called no man master and had no king.”³

Ngarrindjeri intellectual and inventor David Unaipon, in his 1930 book *Legendary Tales*, looks to the day when Australian writers and historians would “use Aboriginal myths and weave literature from them, the same as other writers have done with the Roman, Greek, Norse and Arthurian legends.” Unaipon relates that Aboriginal stories across the continent told of a time long ago when Aboriginal people arrived “in Australia from another land in the north-west. The way of our coming was probably over

an isthmus that has long since been sunk under the seas.” Unaipon also speaks of a first great hero in Narroondarie who was a traditional leader and Law giver. He was the one who had “given the race its first moral training, as well as its social and tribal customs.”⁴ Celebrated historian Geoffrey Blainey took up Unaipon’s challenge (albeit unknowingly). He argues that the migration of Aboriginal people to Australia “might have surpassed any previous nautical achievement” and that in overcoming drastically rising sea levels during the Ice Age, Aboriginal people had been a part of “the most important event in the human history of Australia.”⁵ Indeed, that event is now dated at sixty-five thousand years ago.

Numerous anthropological studies across the past century have noted the longevity and rich cultural Aboriginal connection to the continent and a deep history. Anthropologist A. P. Elkin is adamant that Aboriginal connections to the past “are as they are, because of the personal actions of heroic beings in the past; customs are followed because they were the customs of; or were ordained by, these heroes; and life is possible for man and nature now because of their actions and life giving powers. All that is, that must be and will be is a matter of historical continuity with the past.”⁶

Yuraki for me is a belief that impresses an Aboriginal sense of deep history and time. In contrast, after 1788 the impression was established that the history of this continent began only when British sails appeared over the horizon. It is simply amazing that wherever colonizers went, they met with a supposed historical vacuum. It was as if Indigenous people had been sealed in some sort of time lock, waiting for history to begin with the arrival of Europeans. Of course, today we recognize the fallacy of that understanding.

The concept of deep-time history is all-encompassing. It is about connection, place, and country. Religious studies scholar Tony Swain recognizes that Australian Aboriginal culture “accorded metaphysical primacy to place rather than time.”⁷ This is reflected in any understanding of Aboriginal songlines. This Aboriginal connection is recorded and conveyed through song, story, and artwork. If you were to examine Aboriginal desert artwork and then take an aerial shot over Aboriginal country, you would capture and recognize the songlines landscape. My

father-in-law, Peter Haskins, who worked as a geologist during the 1960s and 1970s in Western Australia, recalls that the French company Elf Aquitaine's aerial shots of large areas of land revealed the tracks Aboriginal people had made over millennia as they criss-crossed the country, still there in vivid detail. David Wroth from the Japingka Aboriginal Art Gallery describes songlines as an important Aboriginal cultural source from which artists draw inspiration: "They are the long Creation story lines that cross the country and put all geographical and sacred sites into place in Aboriginal culture."⁸

You do not have to be in Central Australia, Arnhem Land, or the Kimberley to be in touch with Australia's deep-time history spaces. You may be in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, or any of the capital cities. The songline tracks may have disappeared or been covered over, but they still resonate today beneath our feet. In my case it is in the city of Newcastle in southeastern Australia. The city and its surrounds today, over two hundred years after the British impact, retain many wonderful sites of Aboriginal culture, including rock art, engravings, and stories. In light of that Len Dyall, an archaeologist with the University of Newcastle in the 1970s, conducted many studies of the local region. He recalls that a large scrub fire went through Redhead to Belmont along the coast during that time, and after the introduced scrub like *lantana* had burned away, an aerial photo revealed long-hidden Aboriginal tracks. Many Aboriginal artifacts were collected after that scrub fire.

Tyson Yunkaporta in his book *Sand Talk* reveals conversations with elders who said that time and place at a macro level are connected as the same. Three circles converge as "creation time to Ancestors' time to contemporary time," and "the pattern repeats in the micro as well, with three generations, life stages, and even three parts within a day, a task, a moment." For Aboriginal people, "Creation time isn't a 'long, long ago' event because creation is still unfolding now, and will continue to if we know how to know it. . . . [There is] no start and finish but a constant state where past, present and future are all one thing, one time, one place." Yunkaporta further reflects, "Kinship moves in cycles, the land moves in seasonal cycles, the sky moves in stellar cycles and time is so bound up in those things that it is not even a separate concept from space. We

experience time in a very different way from people immersed in flat schedules and story-less surfaces. In our spheres of existence, time does not go in a straight line, and it is as tangible as the ground we stand on.” He suggests that it was the “creation event that set time/space in motion.”⁹

Like my grandfather Fred Maynard over ninety years ago, Yunkaporta believes that before invasion Aboriginal people worked only a few hours a day “for shelter and sustenance. . . . The rest of the day was for fun, strengthening relationships, ritual and ceremony, cultural expression, intellectual pursuits and the expert crafting of exceptional objects.”¹⁰ In contrast, Western understanding is that time is fixed, as if moving along a distinct line in one direction or like clock hands turning.

Robert Lawlor, an author, artist, translator, and international speaker, defines an Aboriginal understanding of “the passage of time and history not as a movement from past to future but as a passage from a subjective state to an objective expression. The first step in entering into the Aboriginal world is to abandon the conventional abstraction of time and to replace it with the movement of consciousness from dream to reality as a model that describes the universal activity of creation.” Lawlor argues that “the Aboriginal notion of space and identity is interwoven in a way utterly strange to western mentality, as is the concept of movement in relation to space and time. The dreamtime stories contain, in addition to moral, spiritual, and psychic understanding, all kinds of practical information. A story may direct a hunting band to places where the lilies bloom, where turtle eggs hatch, or where wild yams ripen. . . . The outstanding difference is that the Aborigines move through space, and we move through time.”¹¹

Dianne Bell captures this understanding by isolating three critical dimensions: “the past, the present and the *jukurrpa*.” Across the past century “Aborigines have been able to assert a degree of control over their rapidly changing lives; the past has been encapsulated in the present, the present permeates the past. . . . The *jukurrpa* maps out the themes of ritual, dictates ceremonial and social structure and governs the behavioural interactions of living persons.”¹² Lawlor states that the founder of the modern science of magnetism, “William Gilbert, referred to the earth’s magnetic field as its soul,” and that considered in an Aboriginal

understanding, this magnetic field “is the force externalizing the inner dream of the earth. Magnetism is the voice of the earth’s Dreaming; it controls the movement of continents, oceans, plants and animals. It is a voice to which the Aborigines listen with great care—a voice to which our civilisation has become completely deaf.”¹³

Time is vastly different in Western understanding and is manipulated to categorize people, culture, and standing. As anthropologist Andrew Lattas notes, “This creates a landscape of varying times, where to travel across the different spaces and groups of the Australian nation is to move forwards and backwards in time in this realm of time travel, the placement of different temporalities in relationship to each other is an imaginary act of locating the identity(ies) of national subjects which simultaneously establishes the reality(ies).”¹⁴

Aboriginal people were not silent on these categorizations of race and being locked into a Stone Age past by Western thinking. Over ninety years ago Maynard declared that “Aboriginal people were sufficiently advanced in the sciences to control their own affairs.”¹⁵ But this adaptation to modernity was not to be at the cost of losing connection to their traditional past. Maynard was vociferous in his condemnation of the British assault on Aboriginal Australia in the wake of 1788. Clearly, in his perspective understanding of the “civilized” and the “savage” was in fact reversed: “That the European people by the arts of war destroyed our more ancient civilisation is freely admitted, and that by their vices and diseases our people have been decimated is also patent, but neither of these facts are evidence of superiority. Quite the contrary is the case.”¹⁶

But the wave of Western power overrode speakers like Maynard, and Australian settler mythologies manufactured a Stone Age image of the “real” Aborigines and their culture, who remain firmly entrenched in a far-off location in a remote time and space. These mythologies erased an Aboriginal connection to Australia, where we were displaced and replaced by the image of the white settler Australian. This witnessed the birth of the white “bushie,” “mate,” “cobber,” “digger,” and even present-day “yobbo.”¹⁷ Historian Bain Attwood reflects, “I believe, History, as a discourse which employs temporality as a marker of difference, has been the means by which Europeans have constructed Aborigines in

terms of an absence or lack—they were either of another time or were even timeless, and so were not of our time, that is modernity.”¹⁸ This is the timepiece we need to rewind, reset, and recalibrate.

In conclusion, a vast gulf exists between Aboriginal and postindustrial Western understandings of time and space. Aboriginal culture is in tune with Earth and listens to its movement through the environment and its care. Our people had an understanding of a long history, and this was passed down through the millennia, many times older than Western traditions. This history included ensuring that great care was placed on handing the environment to each succeeding generation as a rich, cared-for treasure. It is of critical importance in the twenty-first century to heed Aboriginal advice regarding a rapidly changing world and environment. Today we are faced with increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, and catastrophic storms, fires, and weather patterns. The arteries of life, our waterways, are under serious threat from abuse, misuse, and personal greed. Our people have lived through and noted the impact of ice ages and their aftermath. The knowledge carried across sixty-five thousand years may well be our best defense against a growing global catastrophe. Let us hope that those in power begin to listen before it is too late.

FURTHER READING ON THE CONCEPT OF TIME AND SPACE

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NOTES

1. Koori in the chapter title is a word that describes Aboriginal people of New South Wales and Victoria.
2. AG Staff with AAP, “DNA Confirms Aboriginal Culture.”
3. Maynard, *Fight for Liberty*, 105.
4. Clark, *Knowledge Solution*, 21–22.
5. Blainey, *Story of Australia's People*, 26; Stephen Fitzpatrick, “Blainey Revisits ‘History Wars’ with Fresh Eyes,” *Weekend Australian*, February 21, 2015.

6. Elkin, *Australian Aborigines*, 231.
7. Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, viii.
8. David Wroth, "Why Songlines Are Important in Aboriginal Art," Japingka Gallery, 2015, <https://japingkaaboriginalart.com/articles/songlines-important-aboriginal-art/>.
9. Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 43–45.
10. Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 159.
11. Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day*, 37, 238–39.
12. Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, 46–47.
13. Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day*, 106.
14. Lattas, "Primitivism, Nationalism and Individualism," 46.
15. *Daily Guardian*, April 24, 1925.
16. F. Maynard, Letter to the Premier, 1927, New South Wales Premier's Department, Correspondence Files A27/915, New South Wales State Archives, Sydney.
17. These are all terms of Australian slang to describe the "true" Australian.
18. Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, viii.

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Early European Mariners at Cape Keerweer

Bespoke Variations of an Aboriginal Legend

Peter Sutton

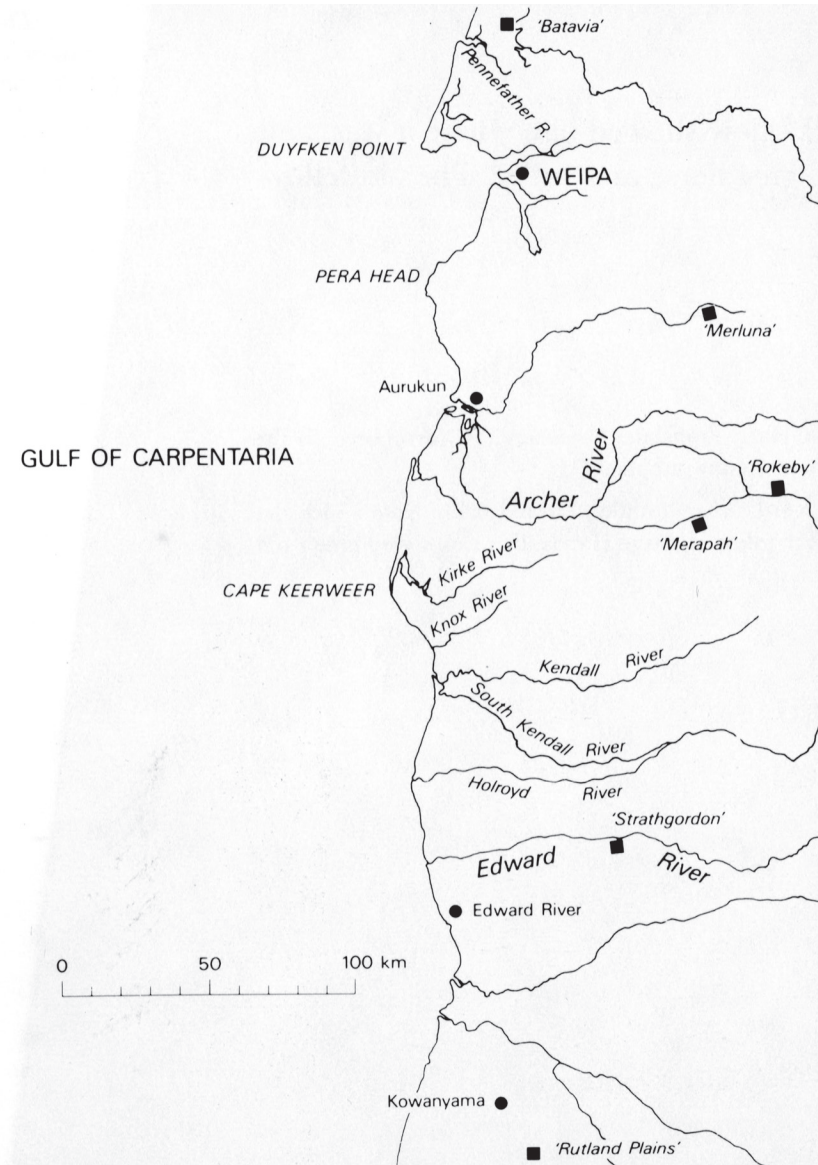
In 1986 Jack Spear Karntin (1905–84) and I published his account of his people’s historic encounter with Europeans on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, Queensland (see maps 3 and 4). The account was in his own language, Wik-Ngatharr, which I transcribed and translated, along with providing commentary.¹ I called the paper “Dutchmen at Cape Keerweer.” Spear had in fact referred to the foreign people as “Scotchmen” and not “Dutchmen” when he told me the story in 1976. However, with one exception, his peers consistently described the intruders as Dutchmen. Therefore, in the 1986 publication I altered the text to read Dutchmen to reflect the general currency of this identification and advised readers in an endnote that I had done so.

I regret having done this, partly because it was not faithful to what Spear had said, but there is a deeper reason as well: I was suppressing a clear example of the way the facts related in this legend could be so divergent among tellers. Since 1971 many other versions of the Cape Keerweer contact story have been recorded besides that of Jack Spear. In this chapter I explore the thirteen versions of the story to which I have access in order to see what common elements they share, to note the ways in which they are different even to the point of mutual contradiction, and finally to comment on the cultural assumption of narrative freedom made by the Wik people who have told such tales.



M3. Australian location map. Used with permission from Hercus and Sutton, *This Is What Happened*.

Although Wik people's understanding of time has not been subject to any special study, it is clear that in many quotidian ways it differs little from Western or many other conceptual schemes. Wik languages, exemplified here by Wik-Ngathan, have words for "day" (*pung*, sun), "yesterday" (*yimangk*), "today" (*antheminth*), "tomorrow" (*ngutetham*), and "the next day"/"day after tomorrow" (*ngool-thun*), as well as times of day including "dawn" (*pachen*), "morning" (*ngoole-wanh*), "noon" (*pung kempiy*), "afternoon" (*pung wayeng*), "late afternoon" (*pung way-wayeng*), "nighttime" (*ngut*), and "middle of the night" (*ngool-wetherr*). In addition, "day-old" (referring to food, for example) is *piiypenh*, literally meaning "camped overnight." They name five major seasons (*kaapem*, *onchen min*, *onchen*, *key-en*, *paayem*) and refer to a year as "a wet season" (*kaapem*) and a month as a "moon" (*wooethech*). They also have terms for "before" or "earlier" (*paay*), "right now" (*antheminth*), "recently" (*nhiikem*, *puuk*), and "after" or "later" (*ngul*). And they have an abstract term for time itself: *aak* or *agu*, depending on Wik variety, a word whose basic meaning is "place" but that is used by extension for time, as in "*Aak*



M4. Cape Keerweer region, Queensland. Used with permission from Hercus and Sutton, *This Is What Happened*.

ngeene?” meaning “When?” To ask the clock time is to say, “*Ma’ ngeen-ngeene?*” (literally, “How many hand?”). *Ma’* is also used for “number” in the case of nights or days.

On the other hand, until the arrival of Western ways Wik people had no clocks, no numeral systems extending as far as twelve or twenty-four, no terms for quarters or precise halves, and no calendrical system of named months, days of the week, or dates of years. After the coming of the Moravian missionaries in 1904 and the earlier incursions of the inland pastoralists, their greatest temporal division was between the coming of the Europeans and the era prior to that event, the latter referred to simply as “before.”

Far from living simply in the here and now, Wik people, including those socialized in the bush beyond the reach of the British Empire, have long had a vital interest in the past and in telling stories about it. Wik oral narratives can be accounts of long-past events or the recounting of events of last night or this morning. The tellers of these stories are often highly polished performers, masters of style and pace and dramatic effect, using a startling array of ideophones like *chub!* (splash!) or *ling!* (flames erupted!), quoting actors in the stories in their own languages, and often engaging projected voice in the telling. The older traditions include spearing stories, highly formal performances in which remembered battles and duels of the past were presented by the narrator with his props of spear and spear thrower providing visual and auditory punctuation. The audience members customarily affirmed the tale at the end of each verbal paragraph by repeating its last words in their own languages, thus giving either a copy or a translation of what had just been said, as a polyglot chorus. The chorus effectively vouched for the truth of the teller’s tale.

The principal measure of Wik historical time depth before the arrival of the missionaries was genealogy and biography: “This happened in the time of your mother’s father,” “That happened in the time of your father’s father’s father’s father,” or “I saw this when I was just a small girl.” That was the secular past. On the religious side, the dramatic mythic beginnings of the world were held to have erupted just before the lifetimes of the earliest remembered individuals, usually the grandparents of living

elders. While evident in the present through their creations of landscape features, such as the domed sand mound at Poenp, said to be swept up there by the tail of the Estuarine Shark, these founding stories did not have the same degree of timelessness as those of the desert peoples of the Australian hinterland, for example. If Wik people believed in an “everywhen,” it was one whose authority came from being instituted at the start of everything. It was metaphysically prior.

In my view Wik people gradually became more historically minded after the establishment of Aurukun Mission in 1904 at Archer River and the introduction of Western time measures and clocks and school history lessons. Their ancestors, however, probably fit anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner’s description of the people of the northwest Northern Territory:

The absence of a time-datum is an embarrassment in such a study [of change in myth and ritual]. On several occasions I thought I had found one, only to have it slip away under other inquiries. I had to conclude that even in matters of genealogy I was dealing with testimony that allowed judgements about presumptive fact, but not very much more. A hard fact—one beyond the polite collusion of memories—was hard to obtain. It was a painful wrench for a European mind to have to deal with so shallow a perspective on time, and with mentalities that are ahistorical in outlook while asserting the contrary.²

The basic story in Spear’s 1986 published version may be briefly summarized as follows:

Version 1: The Scotchmen came to Cape Keerweer (Thew-en, fig. 17) in boats they had built.³ A local man whose main totem was Grassbird lent his two wives to the Scotchmen. The women were detained overly long, so Grassbird and Pat Karntin, Jack Spear’s father’s brother, went to retrieve them. Peter Pumpkin Wolmby was there as well.

As the Scotchmen were releasing the two women, one of the Europeans offered the Aboriginal men a gun so they could shoot some ducks. Fearing he might shoot them, Grassbird and Pat wrenched the gun from his grasp, threw it overboard, and clubbed him to death. They then also killed other Europeans who were on board and threw them



F17. *Left to right: Peter Peemuggina, Clive Yunkaporta, Morrison Wolmby, Silas Wolmby, and Caleb Wolmby at Cape Keerweer (Thew-en), 1977. Photograph: Peter Sutton.*

into the sea. Next, they burned the boat. Three European survivors were then killed onshore with hand stones. Pat and Pumpkin also speared some more to death.

The rest of the boat fleet then came to Cape Keerweer from well offshore. These Europeans mounted a punitive attack on the people living on the south side of Cape Keerweer, who had not been involved in the massacre of the Europeans. Among these innocents were those shot dead as they lay asleep. Survivors scattered eastward and at last sat down at Mooketh.⁴

Not published then was an addendum provided by Spear later that day in 1976, which, together with a version of the story told in Wik-Ngathan by Noel Peemuggina (1910–82), was translated for me by Francis Yunkaporta (1923–98) essentially as follows:

Version 2: Pat was the leader of the tribe. He and others killed the Dutchmen in the morning. Pat took his group back in the afternoon,

and another lot of Europeans was there, so they killed them as well. More Europeans returned and shot innocent people who were on the south side of the Kirke River. Pat and his mob got away.

The Europeans had been showing a man how to use a gun, but he used it the opposite way (putting the cartridge in the wrong end), and they thought the Dutchman was going to kill them, so they speared him and then others.

Pat and the others got frightened by the rising of a damper [unleavened bread] containing baking soda—they thought it would spring up. Tobacco, they threw it away.

When one European shook the nose peg of Pat's brother-in-law, they feared murder.⁵

Another version of the story was published by J. Roberts and D. McLean and was quoted in full in Spear's 1986 published version. Its date of recording was December 1975. Here I summarize.

Version 3: In a version told by a member of the Wolmby family, the Cape Keerweer people welcomed the Dutchmen and approved their plan to erect a city. The Dutch sank a well and put up huts. The locals helped the Dutch by hunting and were given tobacco, but soon the Europeans started to take local women as sexual partners.

Then one day a Dutchman was showing a local man how to use a gun when another man feared the Dutchman was about to shoot his kinsman and attacked and strangled the Dutchman. The Europeans picked up their guns and killed a whole lot of Aboriginal people as a result.

But the Aboriginal people set fire to the boats and used their spears and woomeras to deadly effect, killing and burying six victims. Naming the headland Cape Keerweer, or "Turn-Around," the Dutch fled to the north.⁶

Yet another version we published in 1986 was recorded from Gladys Tybingoompa (1946–2006, fig. 18) by Kevin Gilbert sometime between 1974 and 1976:

Version 4: One day the first six white men come to this country. They crossed the river and met our people. They took one young woman



F18. Gladys Tybingoompa and others dancing at Victor Wolmby's house opening, Aurukun Presbyterian Mission 1976. Photograph: Peter Sutton.

back across the river. Her husband go and say, "Let her go; give her back." No one spoke the language; they could only use signs. The husband came back and said to our people, "Help me get my wife back." So the husband and tribesmen went back across the river and made signs. The white men wouldn't let her go. The husband pulled the white man into the river and choked him. I think that's when it all started.⁷

Another version was told to Aurukun Mission superintendent John Gillanders by Victor Wolmby (1905–76) and Jack Spear in 1971. The following summary comes from the 1997 manuscript by Gillanders. Note that the foreigners are referred to only as "ghosts" rather than Dutchmen.

Version 5: In 1971 Wolmby and Spear were driven to the lower Kirke River area by Gillanders, in the mission Land Rover. They showed him the landing place near which six big ships had anchored. The people in the six ships had come there to build a city. One of the Europeans was the "boss captain."

The "big man" of the local area, a man called "Walmb" [Wolmby], agreed to the lending of two young women to the captain of the boss

ship. But the women were sorry because they were shut up in the ship's hold. Wolmby told the captain the women had been detained overly long, but the captain refused to give them up. The same happened again on a second day, so Wolmby met with other men from along the same coast.

Two of these men had been collecting firewood for the "ghosts" and delivering it to the big ship that was anchored offshore by rowing it across in a dinghy. These men were tired of the work and of being pushed into working. So the next day when they took a load of wood to the ship, they also carried a smoldering fire stick, and they set fire to the wood stacked in the hold.

The captain rushed up the ship's ladder with a powerful firearm. He tried to shoot Wolmby, but Wolmby won the hard struggle over the weapon and shot the captain in the chest. The boat was burned and only five craft were left.

Soon six of the ghosts had been killed by the Aboriginal men, who began to cross the river to get to the other side, but the other ghosts arrived with heavy firearms and shot at the men in the water. Some were killed; some were wounded. Wolmby got across still holding the captain's rifle and walked on alone, worried and ashamed. He walked to a gutta-percha tree at the edge of a large saltpan and stayed there for two days. He hated that rifle, so he walked out into the soft mud and buried it there. Then he was able to talk.⁸

In 1976 I recorded a version of the story from Bruce Yunkaporta (1924–2002):

Version 6: Pumpkin was a really hard bloke. Did you hear about those six Scotch people he killed there at Cape Keerweer? He's the same old grandfather. Those explorers, he killed six of them. See, one of them was playing about with his ear, one European bloke put his finger through his ear.⁹ Well, he didn't like that, and when the European walked away, he put a spear into his backside. Then when the Europeans came back with guns, they hid in the grass and speared them. He killed six of them, that same old grandfather Pumpkin. End of story.¹⁰

Like Spear, Yunkaporta has the Europeans as Scotchmen and not Dutchmen. He makes no mention of detaining women or producing a gun to teach someone how to shoot. The reference to Pumpkin's distended earlobe is not found in any other version except in another recording from Bruce Yunkaporta (version 8). As in Wolmby's 1971 account (version 5), the number of six Europeans killed recurs. The origin of the number six remains something of a mystery, especially given that the languages of the region do not have a numeral six.

In a different recording made with Bruce Yunkaporta, on February 3, 1976, he gave this slightly differing version:

Version 7: This is a story about my grandfather, Old Pumpkin Wolmby. Before my father-in-law [Victor Wolmby, son of Pumpkin] was born, Dutch people used to travel around, exploring the coast. They came to Cape Keerweer, where they saw a lot of people with spears. They rowed to shore in a dinghy, offered the people clothes, and lollies to the children, and damper—but all of these things were thrown away.

That was only a “catch” [trick]. They came with guns and shot one of the locals. Pumpkin speared one bloke right in the heart [and] killed him. He killed about six, and that's true, that's in history book. That happened at Cape Keerweer.

Thursday Island town could have been put up in there. A town could have been put up there. They had everything, posts, cement. But you know where that city was built? In Sydney. That's the first city that was built up. Sydney could have been in Cape Keerweer.¹¹

The intriguing reference here to a history book suggests a possible, and in my opinion highly probable, origin for the term Dutchmen in so many renditions of the story. Someone with access to Robert Logan Jack's *Northmost Australia*—a missionary or mission teacher or an anthropologist, for example—would have read Jack's statement that “it may be presumed” that nine crew of the Dutch ship *Duyfken* were killed at Cape Keerweer.¹² This unfounded presumption continues to be repeated to this today, but for reasons I have detailed elsewhere, several historians including myself have concluded that this view is mistaken and that in

1606 eight crewmen were killed in New Guinea and one 124 miles north of Cape Keerweer at the Wenlock River.¹³

In yet another recorded version of the story, reproduced in full here from Kath Hinchley's 2013 transcription, Bruce Yunkaporta gave the number of Dutch dead (not Scotch this time either) as seven rather than six:

Version 8: Well I'll tell you one bit of a story about my grandad. Long time ago, in Cape Keerweer when the Dutch people, course they used to be explorers, come around the coastline, till they come to Cape Keerweer, that's my grandfather's land.¹⁴ My grandfather [was] name[d] Pumpkin Wolmby. So the Dutch anchored and they pulled to the shore with a dinghy and they saw a lot of black fellas standing on the beach. And they had lot of materials, dress, trousers and shirts and blankets and some flours.¹⁵ They used to give a man a shirt and trousers to wear and they throw it away. Give woman, give them a dress to wear and they'd throw them away. And after that they got a flour and bit of water, make a damper, put it in the ashes and coals and when the damper cooked, break it into pieces and give that, give the damper to all the people what were around there, Aboriginal people, and they used to taste it and throw it away. Course they don't know nothing. And they look [at] themselves['] skin, "We're black, and they're white."

And after that, one of those Dutch people, course my grandad had a hole on his ear, but long time ago they used to put an ear ring, so one of those Dutch people come along and put his finger on his ear, the hole on his ear, see.¹⁶ Yeah, and my grandad don't like that see, so they talk in language one another amongst themselves, must have been say to one another, "That's a cheeky way," like this.¹⁷ So he walked back about four or five steps, then he got a spear and he hit the Dutchman right on his chest and killed him. And away they went. They went in the bush, right on the grass, some behind the tree, and here the Dutch people come along. Of course they had those pellet guns before, long barrelled ones, they come along and they shot a few. And Pumpkin spear another bloke again, 'nother Dutch bloke.



F19. *Left to right: Clive, Francis, and Roy Yunkaporta and Jack Spear with Moving Stone, the sacred manifestation of the Two Girls myth, near Cape Keerweer, 1977. Photograph: Peter Sutton.*

So his brother the same, old Bob Wolmby, that's his brother, so they killed seven of them.¹⁸

There was no source of English names such as Pumpkin or Bob in the region in 1606, or 1706, or 1806. However, they were present in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In October 1977 I was mapping the Cape Keerweer area in fine detail with Jack Spear, Johnny Ampeybegan (1912–84), Clive Yunkaporta (1919–99), Francis Yunkaporta, and Noel Peemuggina (fig. 19). At Wuypeng, the place where the strangers were said to have dug a well just north of Cape Keerweer, I recorded accounts of the story in three languages: Wik-Ngathan, Wik-Mungkan, and English. What follows is a condensed and translated version of what the men said:

Version 9: Noel and Clive began with the Dutchmen asking about water. The locals said water could be found just to the north at Puunanel, but the Dutch dug their own well through the shale and up it came,

good and fresh. The Dutch asked the name of the place and were told it was Wuypeng. The Dutch enjoyed the bountiful fishing there.¹⁹

Clive Yunkaporta then gave his version on that same day in his own clan dialect, Wik-Mungkan. This version makes no mention of Dutchmen:

Version 10: Clive's actual mother's father Pumpkin, and Pumpkin's kinsman Bob, came this way (south) from Puunanel. They saw a whaleboat and a mob of people. "White people eh?" So they went back and told the others about the white people to the south, with their sheet iron and messmate timber.

Rexie Wolmby's "boy" Pumpkin told the white people there was water at Puunanel to the north.²⁰ The Europeans dug through the shale to make a well and found good fresh water. Another boat came, bringing sheet iron. They cut a road through the mangroves to make a landing for the whaleboat.

They asked the Aboriginal men to shoot ducks for them using a lent firearm. They gave the locals flour and calico. But the women were kept overlong in the European boats. Pumpkin, a big-muscle man, Pat, and Bob went on the attack.²¹

In 1995 Francis Yunkaporta and his brother Clive took James Henderson and party to the Cape Keerweer area.²² Henderson had read the 1986 Spear account and had visited me in Aldgate, South Australia, to learn more about the Dutchmen stories. Henderson was a journalist and author with a long-term interest in Dutch maritime history.²³ While at Cape Keerweer Francis gave Henderson a detailed version of the legend, which I summarize as version 10.

Note first, however, that in Henderson's rendition there is an unequivocal identification of the story with the historical record of the seventeenth century. More than once the year is given as 1606, a date that would have been quite unknown to Clive and Francis, with whom I lived over many months and recorded copious amounts of information. Henderson also says that Francis told him, "Those years long ago, that time, we don't know how to count. . . . We only know then how to say one two three."²⁴ The date 1606 must have been introduced into the text by Henderson.

The text containing Henderson's rendition of what Francis told him is generally clear that one of the leading warriors in the story was a man called Peter, who is identified as the "mother's father," the "grandfather," but also, most oddly, as a "great-grandfather" of Clive and Francis.²⁵ Henderson emended Francis's narrative to forge a link between Francis's grandfather and the year 1606, rendering it thus: "That old grandfather of ours [meaning of 1606], he tackled the Dutch."²⁶ It is my view that Francis and Clive were in fact talking about their mother's father Peter Pumpkin, not about someone who had lived four hundred years before, especially given that various recorded versions of the story refer to Pumpkin being at the events with Pat, the older brother of Jack Spear's father and Pumpkin's brother-in-law. Pat died in the 1920s.²⁷ Pat's birth date would have been in the mid to late nineteenth century.

The mother of Francis and Clive, Aanchemalkenh, is recorded as a daughter of Peter Pumpkin Wolmby.²⁸ Clive was born in 1919, Francis in 1923, and their full sisters Ellen Maykomp Walmbeng in 1926 and Annie Maykomp Kalkeeyorta in 1928. It follows that their mother's father, Peter Pumpkin, lived in the second half of the nineteenth century and probably into the early twentieth, not in the seventeenth century.

Henderson tries to overcome these difficulties by stating, for example, "Next morning Francis was ready to add to and explain what he had earlier told us of the encounter at Keerweer in 1606. He was born in 1923 and his ancestry went back via his grandfather Peter Pumpkin and then long, long ago to the warrior leader who defeated the Dutch."²⁹

This is completely inconsistent with the other accounts, including those of Jack Spear, Bruce Yunkaporta (fig. 20, half brother of Clive and Francis), Clive and Francis Yunkaporta (in other recorded versions summarized earlier), Noel Peemuggina (fig. 21), and Ray Wolmby, who place the events involving the Dutch (or Scotch) in the generation of their parents (Spear and Peemuggina) or their grandparents (Yunkaporta brothers and Ray Wolmby). No Wik account of the story even suggests that the key Aboriginal protagonists were ancestors of Pumpkin, Pat, and Bob. Rather, the protagonists were Pumpkin, Pat, Bob, and kin themselves.



F20. Bruce Yunkaporta with son Perry, Aurukun Mission, ca. 1965. Photograph: Neil McGarvie.

This is a summary of Henderson's flawed rendition of what Francis Yunkaporta told him in 1995, misdescribed by Henderson as "the traditional version of the Dutch landings of 1606":

Version 11: The Aboriginal people saw the first Dutch ship north of the mouth of the Kirke River in 1606. They interpreted the boat as a pile of logs and the crew as white devils.

The devils came ashore in boats and began to dig. The next day they showed the Aboriginal warriors how to use a pick, shovel, and crowbar to dig the ground. The warriors dug a well for the devils. They thought the devils came from the sky. The devils showed the men how to smoke tobacco, bake damper, and boil tea. They also showed them a gun for shooting ducks.



F21. Noel Peemuggina and Johnny Lak Lak Ampeybegan at Wuypeng (Dutchmen Well), Cape Keerweer, 1977. Photograph: Peter Sutton.

One man said the tobacco was no good and the smoke that came out of their mouths was their bodily spirit or a spirit from the past. The men were angry. They saw the Dutch as “ghosts,” nuisances who brought evil.

The Dutch people were “misbehaving” (in ways unspecified). This caused a lot of trouble. When the Dutch were working at the bottom of the well, the warriors jumped in and took them by surprise and beat the Dutchmen. The Dutch shot many people, and the warriors speared and killed some Dutchmen. The Dutch returned to where they had come from.

The area was called Cape Keerweer by those first Dutch explorers, a name the Yunkaportas still use.³⁰

The next morning Francis Yunkaporta expanded on the story of the previous day:

Version 12: My mother's father, a warrior, was named Peter by the Dutch. One was teaching him the use of a firearm for shooting ducks. Peter put the wrong end (the barrel) to his shoulder. The Dutchman said, "No, no, no, not like that. You got to put this stock in the shoulder and fire like that, bang." This made the Aboriginal people very angry.

A couple of girls were taken away by the Dutch, and that's when the conflict began. The two girls were in the boat. Peter smothered five or six Dutchmen at the bottom of the well, and he and his kin beat the Dutch with sticks. After Peter and the others attacked the Dutch at the bottom of the well, one of the Dutch went and brought back others who then started shooting the Aboriginal people with muskets, "knocking" about eight or nine people. "We lucky, our father, we escaped."³¹

Henderson then raised the 1606 report by John Saris that the crew of the *Duyfken* had encountered "heathens, which are man-eaters." He asked Francis if he knew this story. "Francis Yunkaporta was not offended as he denied it. 'No. I never heard that, cannibals. My ancestors would have told the story, and they never told us that. No; the warriors did not eat the flesh of their enemies.'"³²

In direct contradiction of this, by 2007 Silas Wolmby's version of the story had come to include a massive feasting on Dutch flesh by the victorious people of Cape Keerweer, who cooked their bodies in earth ovens.³³ Claims of cannibalism are notoriously difficult to substantiate. The following is an isolated report from the Wik region: "The murder of an aboriginal high up on the Archer River, and the eating of the body was reported. The Police from Coen made patrols to secure the murderers who had come down to the Reserve. The wives and the baby of the murdered man also came into the Mission to be safe from reprisals."³⁴

Ray Wolmby (1944–2003) was another grandson of Peter Pumpkin Wolmby. He was one of the most polished raconteurs of his generation.³⁵

Here is a summary of his version of the story, which has elements found nowhere else in the record:

Version 13: The first Europeans to come to Australia came maybe from Spain or somewhere else. They got lost and went to New Guinea, and then to the Gulf of Carpentaria. They went ashore by whale boat under the leadership of Captain Java, who asked my grandfather his name. They learned his name was Puntham and his younger brother's name was Bob.³⁶ Then these old [European] people said, "Ay, your name Pumpkin! And this man Bob. Hey that must be new name for you ey?"

The white men dug a well on the north side of the mouth of the Kirke River, and local people helped them load water in casks. The Europeans asked, "How about we can make a little town here?" Then my grandfather said, "Yes, I your brother, you my brother."

The Europeans gave them shirts, trousers, blankets. They produced a bamboo smoking pipe with a lid, filled with twist tobacco, and the captain shared it with my grandfather, who liked it very much. The Europeans also introduced the local people to damper.

Then something went wrong. The Dutch took young girls, and a fight broke out. My grandfather killed six of them and they shot only two of them with this old gun you know, shot them [the Aboriginal people]. You can see the long barrel, that's what my father [Colin Wolmby aka Colin Yonka] used to tell us. He was a young fella then. He was round about in [his] twenties when those Dutch people were there, my father. Then the Dutch sailed away towards the Northern Territory. They went back then, must have told the Queen maybe.³⁷

I do not have Colin Wolmby's birth and death dates, but his children were all born between ca. 1920 and 1944, which would make his birth date probably somewhere around 1890–1900.³⁸ Ray Wolmby thus in effect puts the "Dutch" encounter at about 1915–25, very roughly.

There is a touching coda to all this. On the evening of July 9, 1990, I went to Cairns Base Hospital to visit my old friend and tribal brother-in-law George Sydney Yunkaporta (c. 1920–90). He was a brother of Bruce and a half brother of Clive and Francis. A stroke had affected his speech and memory. I wrote down at the time, "He saw me as an early

white person at C[ape] K[eerweer]. Gladys [Tybingoompa], who also came, said he thought I was one of the Dutchmen at Cape Keerweer.”³⁹

CONCLUSIONS

While the basic elements of the Cape Keerweer legend examined in this chapter are shared among tellers, each performance of the telling seems to involve—perhaps even require—embellishments introduced by the narrator. Each version is, in the way a tailor hand-crafts each client’s suit, bespoke (tailor-made).

In Spear’s version, there are two women and the Scotchmen give them back willingly. In Tybingoompa’s version, there is only one woman and the Europeans refuse to let her go. Here conflict begins with the refusal to return a man’s wife. While the detaining of women is one of the most common themes, it is not there in all versions. In Spear’s and Wolmby’s versions, it is fear of being shot that sparks conflict.

The versions also differ in the details of the conflict. In Spear’s version, the Scotchmen were first clubbed, then stoned and speared to death. In one of Bruce Yunkaporta’s versions, the first attack on the Dutch was when Pumpkin put a spear into the backside of one of them, and in another, the first spear hit the Dutchman in the chest. In Wolmby’s and Tybingoompa’s versions, the first killing was by strangulation, which may also be Francis Yunkaporta’s “smothered,” while in Henderson’s rendition of Clive Yunkaporta’s and Francis Yunkaporta’s versions, the first attack was by beating. In some versions, Pumpkin holds the weapon back to front or tries to insert a cartridge the wrong way (presumably via the barrel).

Personal affront appears in two forms: a Dutchman puts his finger in the earlobe hole of a local man, and a Dutchman takes hold of a man’s nose peg. This strong reaction to the invasion of bodily space reflects classical Wik constructions of the person, but the accounts are restricted to just two tellers. The versions also differ regarding the new experience of smoking tobacco: in one it is considered repulsive, while in another it is felt to be very good.

Ray Wolmby’s unique suggestion that the Europeans may have come from Spain is curious. When the Dutch on the *Duyfken* named Cape

Keerweer, they did so in a mixture of Portuguese and Dutch: Cabo Keerweer.⁴⁰ Dutch for “cape” would have been *kaap*.⁴¹ Spear calls the Europeans Scotchmen, which Bruce Yunkaporta does once while calling them Dutch elsewhere. Several people call them Dutchmen, as well as ghosts and devils. Wolmby (1975) and Bruce Yunkaporta (1976) are specific about the number of Europeans killed, saying it was six, although Bruce later ups this to seven. Tybingoompa says the number of Europeans on the boat was six. Wolmby and Karntin (1971) say the number of ships was six. Curious.

In the way that each is tailored to its narrator, the different versions of Cape Keerweer stories have exactly the character of traditional myths. For example, I recorded multiple versions of the travels and creative efforts of the Pungk Apelech Brothers, a Wik mythic tradition, and found that there was no fixed canonical text or memorized verbal passages, and different narrators selected different subsets of episodes for their unique performances, while the north-south sequence of sacred sites and the song verses associated with each site remained largely constant.

A secular and historical narrative in Wik practice has that same feature of variability, but it is openly about remembered and named individuals and not about the founding of the landscape and its peoples, it happened in recalled or retold time and not time out of mind, and it has no linked ritual performance or associated sacred carvings and painted designs in the way a number of the sacred myths do. Given the asserted historicity and obvious secularity of the Cape Keerweer tale, it might then be classed as a legend.

These narrative variations on a common basic theme emanate from a Wik cultural practice under which accounts of the past smoothly merge the categories others might distinguish as fact versus fiction into a single category of story. The Wik, like the Warlpiri, have no classical narrative genre of fiction, though they are quick to distinguish truthfulness from lying.⁴² There is an implied customary individual license to elaborate and amend a story with each telling.

In Wik classical tradition, story narration is a form of play, like ceremonies or games. This is not to trivialize the experience. It is deep play. In ceremonies and games the structures and norms are reproduced each

time, but every ceremony enacted and every game played is distinctive. This is demonstrably the same with the oral tradition of the Wik people regarding early European contact at Cape Keerweer.

NOTES

1. Karntin and Sutton, "Dutchmen at Cape Keerweer." Karntin was a male totemic name used as an official surname for records purposes, but he was normally known as Spear or Jack Spear.
2. Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 148. For a survey of the literature on Aboriginal shallowness of historical recall, see Sansom, "Brief Reach of History."
3. The mouth of the Kirke River (Thew-en) and those sites near it referred to in the various narratives cited here (Wuypeng, Puunanel) belonged in the past to a clan that had Piith (Grassbird or Clamorous Reed-warbler) as one of its main totems. The Grassbird man in the stories would have been known by the totemic male clan names Nyoopelen (meaning unknown), Errkema-mamenh (Quickly Grabbed It), and Thiinethe-ngaycheyn (Saw a Coconut). Following the extinction of that clan's patriline, the senior members particularly of the Wolmby (Aayk estate) and northern Yunkaporta (Um-thunth estate) had by 1976 assumed custodianship of the Grassbird people's estate. Sutton et al., *Aak*, 54–55, 382–89.
4. Karntin and Sutton, "Dutchmen at Cape Keerweer," 93–103. *Mooketh* is about 2.17 miles northeast of Cape Keerweer.
5. Sutton et al., *Aak*, 387.
6. Roberts and McLean, *Mapoon*, 35–36.
7. Gilbert, *Living Black*, 292. Note that Gilbert gives Gladys's surname as Nunkatiapin. She was usually known by her husband's surname, Tybingoompa (Thaypenkump, Taipan's Urine), but when talking to Gilbert, she may have used another of his totemic names, conceivably Ngangka-thaypen (Taipan's Heart), as this would match his totemic identity. He was known as Timothy Tybingoompa (1945–77).
8. Gillanders, "Trip to the 'Yyongk' (Yonko)." "Yyongk" is Gillanders's rendering of Yu'engk. "Ornya" is his rendering of Wik-Mungkan *oony*, "ghost."
9. Wik men used to wear large cylinders in their earlobes, and when the cylinders were removed, their lobes had wide holes and were distended.
10. Sutton et al., *Aak*, 383. Original recording September 5, 1976, tape 66, track 1, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Acton.
11. Sutton et al., *Aak*, 387. Original recording February 3, 1976, tape 40a, track 2.
12. Jack, *Northmost Australia*, 1:26.

13. Sutton, "Stories about Feeling."
14. This is correct in broad terms, but the actual sites around the mouth of the Kirke River belonged to a different clan, that of the Grassbird man. Pumpkin's estate was immediately inland of there, centered on the lagoon called *Aayk*.
15. That is, flour for making damper.
16. "Ear ring" here refers to a cylindrical object inserted into a hole in the earlobe.
17. "Cheeky" in Aboriginal English means "aggressive, threatening, murderous."
18. Hinchley, *Aurukun Oral History*, 190–91
19. Sutton et al., *Aak*, 386–87. Original recording October 13, 1977, tape 115, track 1.
20. This means that Rexie Wolmby (1957–98) stood in the relation of son's son's son (great-grandson) to Pumpkin. Great-grandparents in Aboriginal languages are, as here, usually referred to as members of the generation below oneself. One's great-grandchildren are, conversely, members of the generation above oneself.
21. Sutton et al., *Aak*, 387. Original recording October 13, 1977, tape 115, track 1.
22. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, 214n60.
23. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, dust jacket.
24. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, 145.
25. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, 146.
26. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, 145. Inserted text is in the original publication.
27. Sutton, *Field Notebooks*, Field Book 136:155.
28. Sutton, *Field Notebooks*, Field Book 136:167.
29. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, 144.
30. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, 143–48.
31. The father of Francis, Clive, and Bruce Yunkaporta and six others was Charlie Yunkaporta. Judging from the birth dates of his children, which ranged from ca. 1910 to 1928, he was probably born ca. 1885.
32. Henderson, *Sent Forth a Dove*, 148.
33. Silas Wolmby to Peter Sutton, at Aurukun, June 28, 2007, Sutton, *Field Notebooks*, Field Book 159:104.
34. William MacKenzie, Annual Report on Aurukun Mission for 1935, Presbyterian Church—Papers ML MSS 1893 Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Aurukun Mission Diary entries for 1935 indicate that the victim was called Paddy, and among the alleged perpetrators were Jack, Bennet, Mr. Dyer, Jumbo, Tommy Ti Tree, and Schnapper. William MacKenzie Diary, MS 2483/1/10, AIATSIS.
35. His Aurukun community nickname was Liar.
36. On June 28, 2007, at Aurukun I was told by Silas Wolmby (1928–2018), Peter Peemuggina (1942–), and Ron Yunkaporta (1956–) that one of Peter Pumpkin's Aboriginal names was *Peentham* (Sutton, *Field Notebooks*, Field Book 159:106).
37. Hinchley, *Aurukun Oral History*, 213–14.

38. Sutton, *Field Notebooks*, Field Book 136:111.
39. Sutton, *Field Notebooks*, Field Book 64:139–40.
40. *Cambridge Portuguese-English Dictionary*, s.v. “Cabo,” accessed March 18, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/portuguese-english/cabo>.
41. Osselton and Hempelman, *New Routledge Dutch Dictionary*, 183.
42. Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art*, 29.

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Time and Eternity

Aboriginal and Missionary Conversations about Temporality

Laura Rademaker

The great and specifically Australian contribution to religious thought has been the unquestioning Aboriginal conviction that there was no division between Time and Eternity.

—Strehlow, “Geography and the Totemic Landscape,” 132

This chapter explores the twentieth-century conversation between missionaries and Aboriginal people about time. For too much of Australia’s mission history the “conversation” was one-way; while they preached at Aboriginal people, most missionaries had little interest in understanding Aboriginal cosmologies or temporalities. However, there were instances of surprising cultural engagement and points of similarity between missionary and Aboriginal time concepts that opened spaces for conversations about eternal time—the “deepest” of times. Telling the story of conversations about time, the chapter begins with an analysis of the diverse ways missionaries conceived of time, especially in relation to Aboriginal people, arguing that for many missionaries time was more malleable than a linear continuum. It then goes on to discuss ways Aboriginal people used missionary time concepts and finally examines ways in which select missionaries embraced Aboriginal temporalities through Aboriginal language and ritual.

Many scholars have already discussed the incongruities between Christianity's universal scope and Aboriginal land-based spirituality. Yet we also know Aboriginal people found imaginative ways to bring Christianity into their Country, gleaning what they found useful in missionary spirituality, embedding it in their land. We see this in Aboriginal Christian sites, like Jesus's footprints in the Finke River (evidence in the landscape for Arrernte Christians that Jesus visited Central Australia) but also in the way Christianity could be "reimagined" and localized to fit with land-based kinship identities.¹

Missionaries and scholars alike have similarly described Christian and Aboriginal time concepts as irreconcilable, but instances of creative integration between the two have received less attention. It is often claimed, for instance, that Aboriginal time was actually "timeless," whereas missionary time was fundamentally linear and eschatological. Tony Swain, for example, finds that European colonization was such a cataclysmic event for Aboriginal people that their time was overwhelmed entirely.² Aram Yengoyan suggests similarly that Christian and Aboriginal temporalities were so distinct that Aboriginal people were unlikely to convert. Christianity, he writes, has "a futuristic orientation," whereas for the Pitjantjatjara "the eternal is always present" and "the ancient past that lives in the present" determines everything.³

While missionaries did not believe Aboriginal temporalities made conversion impossible, many considered them entirely unlike their own temporalities and therefore in need of absolute replacement. Missionaries emphasized the irreconcilability of their times and those of others, especially of Aboriginal people. One Australian missionary publication from the 1960s claimed that history itself was a Christian concept; only cultures that had received the Bible could wake from their "dreaming," conceive of time as linear progress, and participate in history. "The Bible . . . gave birth to the historical point of view which is the hallmark of western man's thinking and which, in more recent times through the colonial expansion of European peoples, as also captivated the previously unhistorical mind of Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Into the dreaming circles of man's imagination and mythology it has brought a disturbing and compulsive indulgence that has bidden him rise, shake off the sleep

of centuries and gain his historical pilgrimage towards an appointment with destiny.”⁴ Another missionary wrote in 1958 that Aboriginal people had been without time until missionaries “woke them up” and introduced them to modernity. Aboriginal “‘Dream’ days of the past are changing into realities of the present and future.”⁵

The demarcation of irreducible, irreconcilable temporalities has been a practice of modernity and of colonialism in which time is weaponized against colonized people. The missionaries had reason to portray Aboriginal cosmologies in this way—it buttressed their claims that Aboriginal people needed to be evangelized and totally abandon their traditions—so we should be wary of taking missionary claims about Aboriginal thought at face value. In this case it enabled missionaries to position themselves as entirely “modern” in contrast to the supposed “primitivism” of Aboriginal people, who were required to “catch up” with the colonizers.

Johannes Fabian in his groundbreaking *Time and the Other* warns against what he calls the “denial of coevalness,” the tendency of anthropologists to conceive of the societies they studied as operating in a different age, sometime before the present in “evolutionary” or “anthropological” time.⁶ Kathleen Davis builds on his work, interrogating the narrative of “secularized time” that Fabian himself uses. According to this narrative the secular West supposedly experiences time as linear and “empty,” having surpassed its belief in the “enchanted” time of the medieval era and moved on to “historical” times following the Enlightenment.⁷ Famously, Walter Benjamin describes it as “homogenous, empty time.”⁸ Davis points out that when made universal this secularization story also places non-Western societies in different, “earlier,” times than the “modern” and “secular” West.⁹ Suggestions that First Nations people experience time as timeless can likewise deny that they live fully in the present and are active agents.¹⁰ Furthermore, as many have argued and this chapter demonstrates, the “empty homogenous time” of the modern West (and of the missionaries) has been more myth than lived experience for many.¹¹

In view of this I approach this chapter wary of schema that would suggest Aboriginal people experienced time as entirely different from

Europeans. As anthropologist Kevin Birth explains, “Consciousness of time is central to being for all humans,” but this consciousness is “culturally shaped” and creates “different senses of being-in-the-world.”¹² Mark Rifkin writes that Native peoples have their own “distinctive ways of being-in-time” that emerge from their material practices and relationship to Country.¹³ Yet it is one thing to say that First Nations people have their own culturally shaped temporalities and quite another to describe people as timeless or without a consciousness of time that could make conversation with other temporalities possible.¹⁴ As Rifkin acknowledges, we do not exist in “utterly incommensurable and hermetically sealed Indian and white forms of experience,” but rather “discrepant temporalities . . . can be understood as affecting each other, as all open to change.”¹⁵

There is a risk that in seeking to acknowledge First Nations people as fully active in a shared present, I might impose a universal temporality on people who have experienced time differently. In some cases First Nations people have refused the coevalness imposed on them by colonizing powers.¹⁶ As Berber Bevernage points out, the injury of denying coevalness is often that it places people in an “earlier phase” of time and is not necessarily the denial of coevalness itself.¹⁷ There are good reasons why First Nations people have claimed noncontemporaneity with Western times: to uphold their own temporalities as distinct and, with them, their pasts and possible futures. As this chapter shows, in the conversation with missionaries some Aboriginal people claimed a radical noncoevalness, even as they used missionaries’ own temporalities to stake such claims. I suggest that in the conversation between missionaries and Indigenous people time was translated in various ways. Instead of mutually irreducible temporalities, I find mutually imbricated temporalities that existed in creative conversation with each other.

MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY AND TIME TRAVEL

Although missionaries emphasized the irreconcilability of Christian and Aboriginal temporalities, they also sought ways to make their understandings of time comprehensible to Aboriginal people. The Gospel must be translated. The missionaries’ search for points of similarity between their own times and those of Aboriginal people was essential to their

translation projects. The most difficult but most important translation for missionaries was a word for the divine—that is, for God—in a “heathen” language. In Central Australia at Hermannsburg Mission Hermann Kempe translated “God” into the Arrernte language as *Altjira* because he perceived this word as similar in meaning to the Christian conception of God’s time, claiming that the Arrernte *altjira* “comes nearest to the idea of ‘eternal.’”¹⁸ Following him, Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow and anthropologist Baldwin Spencer clashed over the translation of *altyerre*. Strehlow translated it as God. Spencer called it “the dream times,” coining the term that became white Australia’s primary way of conceiving Aboriginal spirituality. But Strehlow’s son, Ted Strehlow, claimed its meaning was closer to “eternal” or “uncreated.”¹⁹ The missionary choice of *tjukurrpa* (also often translated as “Dreaming” in English) to translate God into Pitjantjatjara at Ernabella Mission likewise was not on the grounds that it referred to an Aboriginal god but that the idea of *tjukurrpa*, missionaries believed, was the closest Pitjantjatjara equivalent to the Christian idea of “eternal”; this was about finding times in common.

Missionaries also translated the New Testament term “Logos” into Pitjantjatjara as a related term, *tjukurnga*, in the 1940s. The Logos “was in the beginning,” so again this was a matter of finding (or creating) Christian time in Aboriginal concepts.²⁰ They later used *tjukurrpa* to translate “gospel,” and *Tjukurrpa Palja Markaku*, the Gospel according to Mark (or the Dreaming according to Mark), was subsequently published in 1949.

Missionaries’ belief that the eternal touches on the present meant that time travel, of sorts, was part of their lived experience. Catholic missionaries believed that in the Eucharistic sacrifice, Christ’s body was re-presented—made present—at the altar. This required a concept of time that allowed for past events to intersect with the present—for higher, eternal time to touch on earthly time. Saints, too, operated in this kind of time and thus were thought to be active in the present day. The Jesuits at the Daly River therefore asked Saint John to intervene against floods and exposed Saint Nepomuk’s relics to halt the waters.²¹ At some missions the presence and activity of saints were recorded as they were for other people. These saints, who had lived decades or centuries earlier, were considered a living presence at the missions. In 1927, for instance,

when Tiwi people began attending mass at his mission, Francis Xavier Gsell reported that the “Little Flower”—that is, Thérèse of Lisieux, who had died in 1897—“has filled her Church.”²² Missionaries also recognized the activities of their fellow missionaries who had died. Brother John Pye, for instance, writes of Father Frank McGarry, who had died in 1955, answering prayers to him in the 1970s.²³

As philosopher Charles Taylor explains, the church’s liturgical year reenacts events from the past that “participate in God’s eternity,” bringing eternity into the present, meaning that “this year’s Good Friday can be closer to the crucifixion than last year’s mid-summer day.”²⁴ Catholic missionaries recorded instances of this understanding of nonlinear time when they expected saints to be especially active and present on their feast days. Father Moloney at the Santa Teresa Mission to Arrernte people in Central Australia, for instance, promised Saint Thérèse that if she gave him a sign—one baptism on her feast—he would fill the church by her feast day the next year. Saint Thérèse answered in abundance: Moloney baptized thirteen children on her feast day and soon opened a school.²⁵ According to Moloney, “The Little Flower was at work. She got me to baptise them.”²⁶

Aboriginal people who lived with missionaries in this tradition remember the feast days as special times in the year, marked by celebration, and felt an affinity with these people in the past in the present. As one Tiwi woman told me about Mary and Thérèse’s role at the mission, “We had a feast, like our lady feast day, Saint Thérèse feast day. We named those saints; we used to go out [in the] bush and have a picnic on day when saint’s day. On that day our lady, queen of heaven—you know, that’s the crowning of the lady. Lovely. And when Saint Thérèse’s day we used to go out [in the] bush. She’s the patron of the mission. We learned about her. And we say a little prayer about her. We just say ‘Saint Thérèse help us’ at school.”²⁷

Though Protestant missionaries rejected the idea of the presence of saints, their spirituality, too, required an understanding of nonlinear time. For evangelicals the biblical text was the main mediator of the past to the present. Verses written millennia ago could be understood as addressed directly to them, in their personal circumstances, through an

understanding of God's providence and eternal time, which they experienced by reading the Bible. Missionaries often received their call to be a missionary through an ancient text they saw as addressed to them. As an Anglican missionary told me, "When I was fourteen I sensed God calling me to be a missionary through the verse, one from Isaiah 6, 'Who will I send, who will go for me?'"²⁸ Methodist missionary John Rudder felt that Jesus's instruction to the fishermen in the first century was a coded instruction for him to become a missionary: "[It was] a word of scripture that said, 'Cast your net out on the other side of the boat.' I was teaching for the government, and I understood that to mean teach for the Lord. I knew that that meant missions."²⁹

For others ancient prophecies found their fulfillment in missionary work with Aboriginal people. These missionaries believed that on some level the biblical text was written for their times. For instance, when Anindilyakwa women first contacted missionaries on Groote Eylandt, it was because they wanted to see the white missionaries' baby. Missionary Les Perriman interpreted this as a fulfillment of the Isaian prophecy "and a little child shall lead them," penned centuries before Christ.³⁰

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN SACRED TIME

Missionaries also departed from "homogenous, empty time" where they conceived of the experience of Aboriginal people in terms of epochs of sacred time within the "salvation history" of their own tradition. Salvation history is the story of God's divine plan of redemption through human history, centering on the ancient Israelites, Christ, and later the church.³¹ Augustine of Hippo, for instance, carved the history of the world into six ages, rich in theological significance and mirroring the six days of Creation.³² Christian traditions continued to understand world history as salvation history or sacred history, whereby time also carries theological meaning. Missionaries in Australia held to this tradition when they asserted that modern history was ultimately the story of Christian mission within the terms of salvation history.³³ Yet as prominent Australian historian Ann Curthoys has demonstrated, even secular Australia understood itself in terms of the narratives of salvation history—creation, fall, redemption—so strong was their influence.³⁴ These

Christian narratives buttressed white Australia's claims to modernity. Medievalist Clare Monagle argues that sacred Christian time conspired with modernity in its establishment of a hard break between the past and the present ages. Supersessionary theology, according to the Augustinian model, taught that Christ's coming ushered in a new, universal time—*anno Domini*—that made older practices and times redundant. Modernity insisted likewise that a similar rupture between past and present required a repudiation of the “savage” or “feudal” past, along with those deemed “non-modern.”³⁵ Aboriginal people, according to both narratives, belonged to an earlier age.

Missionaries, however, practiced a particular mode of noncoevalness when they placed Aboriginal people in an earlier epoch of a continuing salvation history. According to a theological denial of coevalness, missionaries cast Aboriginal people as existing, in a theological sense, in the times of the Old Testament and considered their experiences and destiny as analogous to those of ancient Israel. This implied that Aboriginal people were both in need of the Christian Gospel and also inevitably destined to receive Christ, as missionaries imagined their Christian teleology of the Old Testament onto Aboriginal people. Anglican priest and anthropologist A. P. Elkin believed that for assimilation to occur, Aboriginal people must build a “New Testament” on the “Old Testament” of their culture.³⁶

Missionaries were even more explicit about placing Aboriginal people in an earlier spiritual time. The Church Missionary Society's Alf Dyer, for example, asks, “Is God at work in Australian history as in Jewish history?” and answers in the affirmative.³⁷ He describes Aboriginal people as in a “difficult stage, like Israel leaving Egypt, full of grumbles,” saying that “they do not yet realize we seek to lead them to a higher state” (giving missionaries the place of Moses, or even YHWH).³⁸ Aboriginal people's nomadism also made them, in a spiritual sense, “still” ancient Israelites, “wandering” and prone to “sins and superstitions.”³⁹ Lutheran missionary Paul Albrecht wrote in 1964 article in the *Arnhem Land Epistle*, “Our position is analogous to the Old Testament. Here we see how God began his work with the Israelites—from scratch. We, in bringing the Gospel



F22. Interior of mission church, Yarrabah, 1899. State Library of Queensland.

to these people are starting from very much the same position as God started off with the patriarchs—from scratch.”⁴⁰

Blurring evolutionary narratives of human development with theological narratives of progressive revelation, in the 1960s missionaries wrote of Aboriginal people as being like “the Children of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness,” with missionaries carrying the “responsibility of bringing them to the stage where they will really possess the land . . . with the same simple implements that Israel used.”⁴¹ Aboriginal people were, in a spiritual sense, in Old Testament times, and again missionaries put themselves in the place of God.

The language of the “remnant,” common to many missionary societies, also placed Aboriginal people in Old Testament times. In this context the remnant referred to the small population of Israelites who survived the Assyrian invasion of their land. In the New Testament it was used to mean to Jews who had become Christians. The concept gave missionaries a theological framework for understanding Aboriginal people’s plight but also a hopeful expectation for their future conversion. Anglican missionaries wrote of “saving the remnant of this race.”⁴² Methodists

wrote of their “duty to the remnant of the Aborigines” and confidence that “a new era has been ushered in for the remnant of the aboriginal race.”⁴³ A prayer for the remnant, originally referring to ancient Israel, hung above the pews in the church at Yarrabah (fig. 22).

SACRED TIMES AND SOVEREIGNTY

Though sacred history was wielded against Aboriginal people, in some places they seized on missionaries’ sacred times to assert their sovereignty. For instance, Benedictine missionaries claimed that they had wandered in the wilderness for forty days before finding the site for New Norcia Mission on Noongar land.⁴⁴ Therefore, Noongar protesters camped for forty days and forty nights on Herrison Island in 1984 to protest the state government’s planned gas pipeline on their lands.⁴⁵ Periods of forty are powerful and significant within the biblical tradition, associated with punishment, testing, and purification. Noongar people used a sacred form of time within the colonizers’ own tradition, thereby associating themselves with Moses, Jesus, and the Israelites and perhaps even insinuating that it was those who trespassed on their Country who were being “tested” and judged by their protest.⁴⁶

Furthermore, missionaries’ own articulation of the eternal could be used to explain the unchanging Dreaming and Aboriginal people’s connection to it. Murrinpatha man and Catholic deacon Boniface Perdjert called Christ “the great dreamtime figure,” since he is “the same yesterday, today and forever.”⁴⁷ In 1996 the Wiradjuri writer and activist Kevin Gilbert went further, explaining that his Dreaming was the eternal Logos that missionaries preached: “But remember, before Jesus came along there was the Word. The Word is God. Before Jesus came along God was here in my country where the Word is. That Word never changed, never deserted us. . . . We worked with the Law, the Word of the Law, the Word in the rocks and the tress. That’s Aboriginal Spirituality. In a way, I say I’m Christian, or I’m a believer in Christ—the fella who wiped the feet. In the same way I am the land, I’m Kangaroo Man. That’s me. That’s real.”⁴⁸

In numerous instances Aboriginal people claimed missionaries’ periodization, which would place them in the Old Testament of sacred history,

to integrate their own time concepts with those of Christian missionaries in ways that upheld their Dreaming. Some used the Aboriginal people's association with the Old Testament to interpret its theme of the "Promised land" in relation to their own land rights and sovereignty in ways non-Indigenous preachers did not.⁴⁹ Mutthi Mutthi Elder Alice Kelly described Lake Mungo in biblical Edenic language as a place where one might "taste and see that the Lord is good" and where "the spirit of wisdom lies" to make clear the sacred value of her Country.⁵⁰ The Uniting Church taught that Aboriginal Law fulfilled the same function as the Mosaic law in salvation history.⁵¹ Yolngu theologian Djiniyini Gondarra argues that Aboriginal history belongs within salvation history. He describes Aboriginal Law as "given by God" and "further deepened and fulfilled in Christ."⁵² Gondarra claims that his Dreaming was also God-given, using missionaries' periodization within sacred time to do so: "If this God of the Bible was active in Hebrew history in both the Old and New Testament, then he was also active in Aboriginal history and dreaming. We believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is also the God of our forefathers. In Him we have survived and maintained our true Aboriginal spirituality through our religious ceremonies and social life."⁵³

Other Aboriginal theologians have concluded similarly that their Dreaming stories were "essentially the same" as biblical stories but veiled in different language: "In the very beginning, the earth was formless and empty of life. The Creator Spirit, in the form of the Rainbow Spirit, shaped the land, its mountains and seas. . . . These images in our stories are essentially the same as those depicted in Genesis."⁵⁴ Still others claimed a "radical non-coevalness" with missionaries' times.⁵⁵ That is, they maintained that their times were not those of the colonizers. For instance, a Murri man and Baptist minister, Uncle Graham Paulson, insisted that his Aboriginal spirituality formed his understandings of time, saying that "it is Aboriginal spirituality that gives meaning to our pre-history, history, present and future," the implication being that this meaning is not given by missionary temporalities.⁵⁶ Similarly, Anglican minister and Ngandi man William Hall writes that "for Aboriginal people today, and for our children, the future is the Dreaming. . . . We cannot

lose our Dreaming simply because we have been taught about Christianity.”⁵⁷ Against the insistence of missionaries and presumption of some anthropologists, these people contended that Aboriginal temporalities need not be abandoned by Christian Aboriginal people and embraced a noncoeval temporality of their own.

ENRICHING MISSIONARY TEMPORALITIES

Aboriginal people spoke back to the missionaries, inserting their temporalities into missionaries’ times. There were limited instances where missionaries were made to see value in Aboriginal temporalities, even for enriching their own spirituality. William (Bill) Edwards and Martin Wilson both worked closely with Aboriginal people on missions. As *Birth* explains, coevalness requires more than a shared duration of time; it involves “intersubjectively shared concepts of time.”⁵⁸ Edwards and Wilson represent some (rare) instances of missionary moves toward shared temporalities, in conversation and community with Aboriginal people. Their understandings of Aboriginal thought and experiences were also mediated by anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner; both cite him as an authority on the concept of the Dreaming.⁵⁹ Their conclusions were a fusion born of dialogue and shared experience with Aboriginal people, as well as non-Indigenous representations and imaginings of Aboriginal tradition.

Edwards, superintendent of the Ernabella Mission from 1958 to 1972, was skeptical about much Aboriginal theology and had strong reservations about the Rainbow Spirit Elders’ identification of the Rainbow Spirit with the Logos. Nonetheless, he agreed that the “Aboriginal concept which is translated as word, story and Dreaming” has “much in common with the concept of the Logos” and is “one area of many in which Aboriginal Christians bringing insights from their own cultures can illuminate the interpretation of passages of Scripture and enrich the wider church’s understanding of them.” He lamented missionaries’ “lack of attention” to Aboriginal words and concepts that “can illuminate the text of scripture” and cited *tjukurrpa* (meaning “word,” “story,” and “Dreaming”) as one that had “expanded” his own understanding. Aboriginal words used to translate Logos, he believed, were closer in meaning than the English

translation. In the translations he used, tjukurrpa was given the proper noun suffix *nga*, so in his mind, it referred to the “Word Person,” “Logos,” or “Dreaming Person” that was “in the beginning.” This, Edwards claimed, opened space for believing that Christ had always been “present with Aboriginal people.”⁶⁰

Wilson, a Catholic missionary and priest with the Missionnaires du Sacré-Coeur (Missionaries of the Sacred Heart), found that Aboriginal time concepts could answer theological conundrums of his own tradition. Having been a missionary in Papua New Guinea, Wilson worked at the Daly River Mission in the mid-1970s and established the Nelen Yubu Institute for studies of anthropology and missiology. He was very interested in Stanner’s thoughts and even dedicated his book to him.⁶¹ Stanner had learned from Murinpatha people in 1935 at the nearby Port Keats mission, run by the same order of priests. Wilson was interested in understanding Aboriginal cosmology to aid his evangelism, but he was also (unusually) expectant that Aboriginal thought would “enrich” his own theological tradition.⁶²

In a 1970 essay titled “Mystery Theology,” theologian Burkhard Neunheuser explores a theory of time that considers the church’s worship as a “mysterious reality” in which all salvation history is “made present for us now.” But more theological work needed to be done to comprehend this mystery, and Neunheuser called for an “enrichment of the theology of our time.”⁶³ Wilson took up Neunheuser’s call, proposing that Aboriginal time concepts might shed light on this mystery. Wilson perceived the Eucharistic sacrifice as a kind of time travel, as eternal time touches on the present moment. How this is possible, Wilson argues, can be understood with reference to Aboriginal ceremony and the Dreaming as an “everywhen.” Just as Aboriginal ceremonies not only commemorate Dreaming events but “mediate that initial creative activity through time,” the Eucharist also is the “means of present access to the initial saving act of Christ.” Both Aboriginal ceremony and the Eucharist “inject an eternal worth into tracts of time.” Infusing the temporality of salvation history with the Dreaming, Wilson calls Christ’s passion “the greatest Dreamtime happening ever,” explaining that partakers in the Eucharist “participate in and draw vitality from

[this] central event of salvation-history.” Understanding Aboriginal religion therefore, he claims, “can strengthen us in our task” of articulating the Christian religion.⁶⁴

Ultimately, Wilson’s conclusions went unheeded by his church hierarchy. As Aboriginal leader and former Missionaries of the Sacred Heart priest Patrick Dodson remembers, these theological innovations of the 1960s and 1970s opened opportunities for deeper dialogue and encounters between Aboriginal ritual practices and the Roman rite. Yet he eventually was disappointed, believing that in Australia, the church “rapidly closed the windows” after a temporary openness to Aboriginal ideas and practices.⁶⁵ His frustration was shared by many Aboriginal Catholics.⁶⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Thinking about Indigenous times presents us with fresh insights into the encounter—and contest—between Indigenous peoples and their colonizers. Time reveals that the colonizers’ modernity was sometimes more myth than reality. The often-cited binaries between Aboriginal and Christian, modern and premodern notions of time were not as distinct as has been claimed. Instead I find that what historian Vanessa Ogle calls “variegated landscapes of time” existed among missionaries and among Aboriginal people in their dialogues with each other.⁶⁷ In many instances Aboriginal people incorporated, adopted, and played with missionary concepts of time to claim sovereignty over their land and their history. The missionary concept of the eternal Logos offered a language through which Aboriginal people could articulate an eternal sovereignty and Dreaming of their own.

What is perhaps more surprising is the rare cases, such as Wilson and Edwards, where missionaries learned from Aboriginal concepts of time, finding insights of value for their own tradition from Aboriginal thought (though, notably, without ceding spiritual authority to Aboriginal people). This account of translation of temporalities challenges not only understandings of the incommensurability between Indigenous and modern times but also our understanding of the supposedly unidirectional ways in which modern times were imposed on and wielded against Indigenous people. Missionaries’ temporalities were not entirely impervious to the

ideas and times of Indigenous people. Indeed, Aboriginal people found that they could infuse these temporalities with their own times, turn them back on the colonizers, and even use them to claim sovereignty.

NOTES

1. Austin-Broos, *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*, 21–22; see also Kenny, *Lamb Enters the Dreaming*; Rademaker, *Found in Translation*; Leavelle, *Catholic Calumet*.
2. Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, 288–89.
3. Yengoyan, “Religion, Morality,” 234, 247–48.
4. Hewetson, “History Makers,” 22.
5. Montgomerie, *I Am Come*.
6. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 31.
7. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 2.
8. Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, 395–96.
9. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 2.
10. Kowal, “Time, Indigeneity,” 105.
11. Hamann, “How to Chronologize,” 286; Taylor, *Secular Age*, 59, 714.
12. Birth, “Creation of Coevalness,” 14.
13. Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 29.
14. Reddy, “Eurasian Origins,” 356.
15. Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 3; see also Reddy, “Eurasian Origins,” 356.
16. Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2; Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 153–54.
17. Bevernage, “Tales of Pastness,” 371.
18. Green, “Altyerre Story,” 160.
19. Austin-Broos, “Translating Christianity,” 16; Green, “Altyerre Story,” 158, 164.
20. Boer, *Last Stop before Antarctica*, 155, 173–74.
21. Ganter, *Contest for Aboriginal Souls*, 96.
22. Francis Xavier Gsell to Paul Flemming, April 4, 1927, MSC 0564, Congregation of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Archives, Kensington, Sydney.
23. Pye, *Santa Teresa*, 8.
24. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 58.
25. Wilson, “Northern Territory,” 35.
26. O’Grady, *Francis of Central Australia*, 31.
27. Elaine Tiparui, oral history interview with author, August 31, 2016.
28. Julie Rudder, oral history interview with author, January 7, 2012.
29. John Rudder, oral history interview with author, January 7, 2012.
30. Les Perriman Oral History 1981, Northern Territory Records Series, TS 226.
31. Zakai and Mali, “Time, History and Eschatology,” 393–94.
32. Augustine, “Of the Six Ages.”

33. Hewetson, "History Makers," 21.
34. Curthoys, "Expulsion, Exodus and Exile," 4.
35. Monagle, "Politics of Extra/Ordinary Time," 3–4.
36. McGregor, "From Old Testament to New," 42.
37. Alf Dyer, "The Story of Groote Eylandt," Northern Territory Records Series, 693, part 1, item 6.
38. Alf Dyer, "Oenpelli Mission Report, January 1929," Northern Territory Records Series, 1099, part 1.
39. Arrowsmith, *These Australians*.
40. Albrecht, "Can a Polygamist?"
41. O. Bingham, "Groote Eylandt Mission Agricultural Report, October 1962," Northern Territory Records Series, 1098.
42. "What of the Aborigines?"
43. "Our Northern Territory Missions," 11; "What We Are Doing," 10.
44. Ganter, *Contest for Aboriginal Souls*, 83.
45. Baines, "Litany for Land," 227.
46. Baines, "Litany for Land," 241–42.
47. Russell-Mundine and Mundine, "Aboriginal Inculturation," 101.
48. Gilbert, "God at the Campfire," 63.
49. Riches, *(Re)Imagining Identity*, 198.
50. Kelly's address to the 1989 state meeting of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council, in Wilson, "Lake Mungo," 5–6.
51. McDonald, *Blood, Bones and Spirit*, 186.
52. Gondarra, *Series of Reflections*, 32–33.
53. Gondarra, *Father You Gave Us*, 2–3.
54. Rosendale and Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, 29.
55. Bevernage, "Tales of Pastness," 352.
56. Paulson, "Towards an Aboriginal Theology," 316.
57. Hall and Hall, "Dreams, Visions," 37–38.
58. Birth, "Creation of Coevalness," 14.
59. Edwards, "Rainbow Spirit Theology," 140; Wilson, *New, Old and Timeless*, iv.
60. Edwards, "Rainbow Spirit Theology," 140, 144.
61. Wilson, *New, Old and Timeless*, 68, iv.
62. Wilson, *New, Old and Timeless*, 55.
63. Neunheuser, "Mystery Theology," 386.
64. Wilson, *New, Old and Timeless*, 57, 61, 63, 50, 57.
65. Dodson, Elston, and McCoy, "Leaving Culture," 253.
66. Russell-Mundine and Mundine, "Aboriginal Inculturation," 111.
67. Ogle, "Whose Time Is It?," 1401–2.

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CHAPTER 12

On the Shores of the Narinya

Contemporary D'harawal Interactions
with Ancestral Knowledges

Shannon Foster

*gawura gudahgah
nangirri dahli
dulumah, dulumah*

*d'harawal kai'mia
ngahmuru yuolee
bohdahlah, bohdahlah*

—A song for the whale baby: Whale baby sleep and come this way.
The people and their warrior will guide you and protect you to the safe
place for children.

ACKNOWLEDGING COUNTRY

I wrote this chapter with (and on) D'harawal Country (now known as Sydney), and I thank her for her assistance in bringing this knowledge forward. I give thanks to her also for my place here on this Earth; for protecting my Ancestors and keeping them safe, allowing my presence here today, in this time and space. I welcome you all as visitors to our Country and its knowledges, provided here in the pages of this book, for your understanding and guidance. I acknowledge all the other Aboriginal people who also know this Country as their home, and though they may



F23. (above) Sandstone outcrop on D'harawal Country in Sydney's Royal National Park.

F24. (right) Gawura, the whale, engraved into the sandstone by our Ancestors.

call her Dharug, Gai-mariagal, Gundungurra, Guri-Ngai, or other names, we are all connected and love and protect her as our mother.

Ngeeyinee Bulima Nandiritah (May you always see the beauty of this Earth).

GAWURA, THE WHALE

This Narinya story begins on the wild, green, rocky landscape of D'harawal Country in what is now known as the Royal National Park on the southern outskirts of Sydney. When I was a kid it seemed like a long, long drive to get there. My father would point out the distant Sydney city skyline, barely visible on the horizon. The buildings looked like the illustrations I had seen of ancient civilizations or alien outposts compared with the saltwater Country we were driving through. It did not seem particularly unusual to me that my father could navigate by the plants and other unassuming landmarks to find the hidden bush entrance that led to some of our family's secret ancient sites.

As I followed my father through the prickly scrub on one of our trips, he seemed to be walking much faster than usual. He was walking with purpose, excited to be back where we belonged and eager to share his



knowledge with us. The rest of us were clearly walking too slowly for his enthusiasm. Soon we came to a clearing and found ourselves standing on a huge slab of sandstone coastline overlooking a vast expanse of meandering waterways and ocean (fig. 23). Dad told us to look down. It was then that we noticed a deliberate line carved in the sandstone. The line ran a long way in each direction. Following it around the sandstone clearing, we recognized that we were standing on the outskirts of an image of a huge whale, Gawura, engraved into the rock (fig. 24).

At the time I had no idea that I was a part of our Narinya, our living Dreaming, and in this space and time we were with our Garuwanga, our ancestral knowledges. Our engravings are a manifestation of our Ancestors and the knowledges they have passed on from generation to generation. It is only as an adult that I came to realize not all families made these pilgrimages. Not everyone was taught which plant led to a secret path in the wild bush. Not everyone was a D'harawal garigalongung (D'harawal saltwater person).

KAI'MIA, THE WARRIOR

The Narinya story of Gawura, the whale, ties me to our Garuwanga, our ancestral stories that have been passed on to us through countless millennia. Here on the sandstone our Garuwanga tells us of a warrior, Kai'mia, who tried desperately to save our young ones from the punishment of not respecting and acknowledging our Ancestors.¹ The young ones were trapped in a cave while trying to escape rising waters and powerful storms that had erupted across the country. Kai'mia died in his attempt to save them, his blood spilling onto the earth. Wherever it spilled a beautiful flower, the Kai'mia (Gynea lily), grew (fig. 25). He left a trail of blood drops to guide the old people to the cave where the young ones were trapped. Out of each drop another lily soon grew. The trail of lilies marks out a Songline that leads from forest Country to the coast to celebrate our sacred animal, Gawura, the whale.

D'HARAWAL STORIES IN TIME

D'harawal people are storytellers. We are here to tell our stories, and this story comes from the space that exists where our Narinya stories find life



F25. The Spirit of Kai'mia (Gynea lily).

with our Garuwanga stories. The Narinya is our living Dreaming—our stories and knowledges that are alive, breathing, evolving, and responding to this space and time, in the now. As a Knowledge Keeper I have an understanding of our now, but I must also know the past and prepare for the future. With our Narinya must also come our Garuwanga, our ancestral knowledges. Both the Narinya and the Garuwanga have the potential to be our Waduguda, or Law stories, stories that teach us how to live, who to be, and how to become.

I see the processes of time and knowledge as like weaving. When we pick up durawi (grass), from the very first movement we are aware that as we work the durawi, we are laying a foundation for something else to be built on it. No stitch is created and then forgotten. Each remains as deeply important as when it was created, long after it was necessary in the immediate moment, in the actions of weaving and stringing. Like each loop and twist in woven grass, the past, the present, and the future all coexist within our knowledges. They are reciprocally entwined; one does not exist without the other.

Before I write further about the stories of my people, it is important for me to explain my own Narinya or positioning. In many Western research contexts today, it is considered necessary to be unbiased and objective, supposedly to leave your subjectiveness behind to engage in research that is underpinned by the pursuit of truth (though this is less and less often the case). As Aboriginal people, working in the research world, we know that this is impossible.² We are human, with life experiences, cultures, beliefs, and dreams that inform everything we do and connect us to everything around us. With this in mind we argue that it is imperative to state your positioning to give context to who you are and what you have to say and how this should then inform others. For us knowing who someone is and where the person is from is important for understanding how we are connected. This assists us in establishing relationships between one another and with our communities.

WHO'S YOUR MOB?

I am a D'harawal garigalo ngung (saltwater person). My immediate family originated in Guriwal (La Perouse), where my D'harawal father

was born in the Aboriginal mission on the northern shores of Kamay (Botany Bay). I was born and raised on Kai'ee-mah (Georges River), and Galumban (Sydney) has always been and will always be our home and mother. I have always lived on Kai'ee-mah, and it is here within the mud that our Garuwanga has survived and the story of Kai'mia (the warrior and now the GyMEA lily) rises to life and breathes strength into my Narinya. Our family has been here on Country in Sydney since the beginning of time. While that is enough for me to know, you may also like to know that my family is mentioned in European notes from the early days of invasion in Sydney.³

I have always known that Sydney was our Country and where our stories survived, yet because of outsider research, I have had to continually contend with supposed experts telling us who we are and where we belong while creating incomplete histories that are then absorbed by the masses as truth and fact.⁴ So while we know who we are, where we belong, and the importance of our stories and knowledges, it is time for others to now know too. I take this important opportunity, in a context where blak voices are rarely heard, as my right of reply to the archives.⁵ This chapter attempts to address some of the misrepresentations and corruptions of our culture and knowledges, not to disparage the work of others but to expand and give depth and meaning to what exists on record. Through this work I hope to give my Ancestors and Elders their rightful place here in the stories of Country and to magnify their voices and continue their work so that the footprints they left behind for me to find can be found by generations to come.

I share our knowledges not only to document the stories of the people here today but also to honor those who are not here.⁶ Those whose lives and hardships, character, and honor paved the way for me to be here today, able to do this work. They should not be forgotten but celebrated. Their stories should be brought with me into academia and not continually silenced within systems that have only ever sought to erase their voices. Their stories are vital to understanding the stories of today. Ello warawara naruwai burudi (To know tomorrow we must first know yesterday). It is all part of the interwoven knowledges that inform our experiences today.

I will pay tribute to the people who have passed, for they did not have the opportunities that I have had. They could only dream of the world that I live in, as flawed, racist, and culturally unsafe as it still is. My experiences have been different from theirs. The fact that I am able, even encouraged, to honor our stories is evidence enough of the changes within the systems that have cultivated the oppression and abuse of our peoples. The actions of my Ancestors and Elders have been instrumental to this change; it has not been granted for free or bestowed on us by the inherently racist system that invaded our cultures.

The generations before me fought a long, hard battle for me to be here. I must make the most of this opportunity and continue the struggle, because it is a long way from being over. I must fight for the next generations in the same way as the previous generations fought and suffered for me. Their stories inform who I am today; they have left their footprints in the earth for me to find, to know and understand who I am and where I come from, and I want the same for the generations after me. I want them to know that they are not alone, that we come with them on their journey, and that this is not just written into their DNA but held within their every word spoken and every step taken on this Country.

Future generations need to know these stories in the same ways that I do today. They forge my cultural connections in a world that wants to question, probe, and judge everything I say and know because, with my fair skin and green eyes, I carry the scars of assimilation. I am not the Aboriginal person they are expecting because they are expecting no one at all. I was raised surrounded by a white community that assumed that no Aboriginal people from Sydney survived British colonization on this Country.⁷ Evidence of this assumption is still here all around us—on signs and in books, documents, archives, images, words, hearts, and minds. Everywhere we look we are spoken about, at best, in the past tense or just not at all. We are considered to be some long-lost and forgotten people, while many believe that “real” Aboriginal people have dark skin and can now be found only in the Central Desert or Top End of Australia.⁸

Those doing cultural work in Sydney often assume that there cannot possibly be anyone left to engage with here on Country and instead work with people from other areas. They seem to believe that we are

replaceable by people from other Aboriginal communities. They revert to the tick-a-box protocol of working with Aboriginal communities through land councils and other government bodies that exclude many peoples that actually belong here on Country.⁹ Not only does this go against Aboriginal protocols that request that local people be consulted before approaching others from outside the local area, but it also perpetuates the damage and erasure of colonization.

We are lucky to have survived here on the frontline. There have been, and still are, many factors that seek to wipe us out along with our knowledges. It is not common to find people who have always belonged to this Country, Sydney. We are here now to say that not all of us died out during the initial stages of colonization and the disease, the destruction, and the dispossession from our Country. We have survived. We are still here.¹⁰

THE PAST OF MY PRESENT

I now share the story of my family, as knowledge passed down to me along with so many other stories. My father was born in the “assimilation era” of colonization during the 1940s. With a white mother and a proud blak father, my father was considered a “half-caste” in the eyes of the government and thus a candidate for assimilation by whatever means possible.¹¹ Under the care and protection of my great-grandmother and the community of staunch aunties and uncles, my father managed to avoid being stolen by the authorities on the Guriwal (La Prouse) mission and illegally adopted out to a white family or sent to an orphanage.¹² Despite this, he still did not escape all attempts from the government to assimilate him into the white community.

My father was just three years old when the family was enticed into a reserve at Herne Bay (now known as Riverwood) on Salt Pan Creek by the promise of obtaining a Housing Commission house. Through a policy of assimilation by the Housing Commission, if both parents were Aboriginal the family was allocated a house in Blacktown (previously known as the Black Town).¹³ Families like my father’s, with one white parent, were allocated houses in a suburb occupied by white Australians with the intention that, separated from their Aboriginal community, family, language, knowledges, and culture, they would assimilate into

the white community. The overwhelming pain and destruction of living as the only *blak* child among a racist white community was of little regard to the government.

My father suffered horrendous racial abuse during his childhood that still haunts him today. Throughout the years it had never occurred to us that my father's traumatic circumstances had been deliberately orchestrated by the assimilation policies of the government. We had thought it was just fate or happenstance that his family had ended up in the very white Sydney suburb of Narwee, but it was exactly as the government had planned. By the 1960s, when my father was just a teenager, he unknowingly played into the government's hands when he met and fell in love with a local girl, my red-haired, fair-skinned white mother. They were married in 1967 and moved even deeper into white, racist, suburban Australia, where they had us kids, thereby "breeding out" the *blak* (as the government would describe it).¹⁴

Today I am a walking, talking, fair-skinned, green-eyed example of the effects of assimilation policy on my father's life, but I was born in a different era of colonization. I was born during what has become known as the "integration era," the "Great Australian silence," or the "great silent apartheid."¹⁵ In his essay for the 1968 Boyer Lecture series, "After the Dreaming," anthropologist Bill Stanner gives a brief history of Aboriginal people at the time of European invasion through a study of the notes of the colony's governor, Arthur Phillip, and concludes, "From this time on, according to one [historian], 'the native question sank into unimportance,' which I understand to mean that no one bothered any more about it. According to another, the Aborigines became 'a melancholy footnote to Australian history' and, to yet another, 'a codicil to the Australian story.'"¹⁶ We were forgotten by the average Australian by the time I was being raised during the 1970s and 1980s. What little they did hear about us was driven by the negative stereotypes and deficit discourses of the colonial government, which just wanted us gone.¹⁷

In her 2014 article writer and scholar Caroline Beasley explains that Stanner's now-famous lecture asks historians to end the silence surrounding Indigenous cultures in Australia and that this "altered the foundations of Australian history by creating a new field: Indigenous

Australian history.”¹⁸ “I hardly think that what I have called ‘the great Australian silence’ will survive the research that is now in course,” Stan-ner asserts. “Our universities and research institutes are full of young people who are working actively to end it.”¹⁹ In the wider Australian setting Aboriginal rights and political activism were also contributing to the end of the “silence” with events such as the 1967 referendum, the resistance against the 1988 bicentenary celebrations, and the Mabo and Wik native title decisions bringing Aboriginal people and cultures to the forefront. Beasley states, “Ultimately Indigenous Australians moved from being a ‘melancholy footnote’ in Australian history, to occupying a central place in the historiography.”²⁰

I would argue otherwise. The silence in the Australian education system had not ended by the 1990s. Despite the growing presence of Aboriginal people and cultures in the Australian historical and political psyche, my experience of education during the 1970s to 1990s was a complete whitewash. Where I grew up, on the outskirts of Bankstown, in a white enclave in suburban Sydney, not a word about Aboriginal people was taught in primary or high schools.²¹ Australian history began with Captain Cook “discovering” Australia, and it was as if nothing had happened here before that. I remember being taught that Australia was *terra nullius*, land belonging to no one.²² If I talked about being an Aboriginal D’harawal person, I was told repeatedly that I could not be an “aborigine [*sic*],” as the only Aboriginal people left, apparently, lived in Central Australian desert towns like Alice Springs. I made it through three years of university and six months into a postgraduate before a subject called Indigenous studies was offered. I was twenty-two years old.

In retrospect, it seems as though the government believed that if we were not mentioned, we would just go away, as assimilation did its thing.²³ We were to be grateful about being included in their society, as well as silent about anything that did not fit in with their version of normal. They would not mention anything about our different cultures, at least not anything of substance, and neither, they hoped, would we. No one would think to ask or mention because, thanks to assimilation policy, we are fair-skinned and do not “look Aboriginal.” Out of sight, out of mind.²⁴

But while the government may have been able to “breed out” the color of our skin, it could not do the same to the culture in our hearts.²⁵ You see, Dad was still telling us stories and sharing knowledge with us, and he had surrounded us with a community of Dubuyara’ora (The Hidden Ones): other Aunties and Uncles also living in hiding in white communities who could fill in the gaps and strengthen what we had learned from Dad. The onslaught of colonization against my family meant that we have witnessed the destruction, erasure, and silencing of much of our culture and knowledges; but we are still here and we are still strong in culture.

MESSAGES IN THE SANDSTONE

My Elders taught me that Garuwanga stories like that of Gawura, the whale, remind us that we do not follow the processes of colonial time. Time is insignificant. For our knowledges human beings do not dictate time; Country does. Country informs us, and we follow the movements of Earth; this renders the colonial notions of time utterly redundant. This moment, *naway* (now), is the only certainty, and it requires complete attention for information to be recognized, observed, and understood. It is pointless for us to be told by an outside force as meager and solitary as humanity that it is a month called March and a season called autumn has begun. Not only is this a Northern Hemisphere notion of seasonal time, but it also fails to take into consideration the Country to which we belong, her Spirit, her nuances, and the interactions of the organisms that belong to her. Instead, we take our cues from Mother Earth herself.

Our culture may not have had a written history for long, but it has physical and visual representations of our enduring association with Country: messages from our Ancestors to remind us of who we are and our place in our culture and the world. In addition to telling us stories and sharing what he knew, Dad took us to special cultural sites to remind us that we are part of something so much greater, older, bigger, and more meaningful than the racism we suffered in our everyday lives. He made sure we understood that we have survived generations of genocide and assimilation to be here in this place and time and to know the knowledges that are contained in and on our Earth in the form of our sandstone rock engravings.

Our engravings are a gift from our Ancestors—a tangible, visible gift existing in a world where the forces of colonization would prefer that we be completely invisible. We are here now to decolonize the knowledges of our engravings, to reclaim the stories that exist in the archives and records of anthropologists and historians, and to tell the stories of the engravings in our own way, relating to others what the engravings mean to us. To you they may be a record of our deep human history, of times gone by, as evidence of habitation and occupation, but to us they manifest the Ancestors and their care for us.

FINDING GAWURA

On arrival in saltwater Country the people know where to gather because the old people have left them signs. They have marked the earth with Gawura's image, and in these images Gawura's spirit survives. They are not just visual but also spiritual. They are not merely images engraved in the sandstone; they are the living spirit of our Gawura Ancestor held here on this earth so we can celebrate with them season after season. As the Tugarah Tuli (May–June or winter in the European calendar) envelops the earth, Kai'mia raises a flower stalk. It reaches toward the sun, and long queues of burrugun (echidna) rustle around in the bush seeking a mate. The bud of Kai'mia opens in a beaming torch of red petals, signaling to the people that it is time to walk to the coast and gather on the sandstone shorelines to celebrate Gawura. We line the coast, standing among the engravings, and sing Gawura in on her migration up the coast to have her baby, marking out the way like lighthouses in a storm, just as Kai'mia (the warrior and Gynea lily) lights the way through the forest for the people.

In a Western-centric historical context our stories have been dismissed as just oral histories, mere myths and legends.²⁶ More value is given to Western records that are written down. But lies can be written down too. Stories can be erased and knowledges concealed from the texts. Who is to say which is more accurate? Current research has revealed the accuracy of the oral histories of Indigenous Australians, with some stories accurate in great detail going back as far as ten thousand years.²⁷

Western science interrogates the archaeological and cultural validity of our engravings.²⁸ Initially ignored or dismissed in early European

accounts of Aboriginal cultures in Sydney, our engravings are now studied, dissected, objectified, pondered, examined, and analyzed. It has been akin to watching your grandmother being poked and prodded by doctors and discussed like a specimen of science. They will never understand how she is loved and that she is a person with memories, stories, and connections to people who will live on long after her and remember her and speak her name. She is not just a barren piece of sandstone with no agricultural worth or structural integrity. She is our Ancestor, but she is not only our yesterday; she is also our today and tomorrow, and she will be here for our children long after we are gone. She is our “everywhen.”²⁹

Western scientific knowledge tries to estimate the age of our engravings. Five hundred years? Thirty thousand years? The dates differ wildly. We have maintained the engravings throughout their lifetime as part of our ceremonial practices, but this ongoing care puts the scientists’ dating estimates in doubt. Our culture is continuous. Our engravings are a physical manifestation of the notion that has now become widely accepted—we are the oldest continuous culture in human existence.³⁰ We have continually practiced culture from the “times” of deep human history to today, and we can see the future for the engravings too. We have lived with them and reengraved them according to a complex and sophisticated calendar of interrelated events, taught through a process of knowledge revelation and acquisition.

There is no purpose for us as D’harawal people to know a time or an age. Dates add nothing to our culture and stories that say the engravings were always here. Time can only gauge their archaeological significance and value as evidence of deep human history. We know their value; it has nothing to do with time. Time is a construct imposed on us by a different culture and society. It does not apply to the knowledges of our culture. Our engravings are beyond time. We know they are significant, and we accept them as evidence of our Ancestors. What more can be gained by poking and prodding?

For us today is as necessary and important as yesterday and also tomorrow. No more value is given to one or the other, so time itself becomes insignificant. Everything is interrelated; no moment is more important than another. Every moment and action is dependent on the others. As

Indigenous Australian novelist Alexis Wright explains, “All times are important to us. No time has ended and all worlds are possible.”³¹

The real question is, what is the future for the engravings now that a colonial government has imposed its laws on the people and the land? Places of Aboriginal significance can be declared official Aboriginal places by the government and protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act (1974). Despite decades of petitioning, local peoples throughout Sydney have not been allowed to engage in cultural practices on these now “protected” sites without risking legal action. Without cultural management, over time the engravings have been wearing away. In some cases they are now barely visible, overgrown by the surrounding scrub, mosses, and introduced weeds and grasses. If the actual engravings are not overgrown, the paths to them inevitably are. Without the care and management of our Dharamuoy (Keeper of the Flame), the paths to our sacred Country are not kept clear and maintained with fire, so the surrounding bush is overtaken by prickly tea tree. In his award-winning book *Dark Emu*, Yuin and Bunurong man Bruce Pascoe reveals that our fire management is far more complex than just fire-stick farming.³² Our culturally informed fire practices also ensure the biodiversity of the ecology and the propagation and survival of species that would otherwise be displaced by invasive species like the prickly tea tree. Many of our sites have become so overgrown that they are now impossible to access without the assistance of a machete; of course, this is completely illegal within a colonially “owned” national park.

Contemporary Western fire management programs have misinterpreted our fire knowledges and reduced them to what Australians know as backburning and hazard reduction fires. But what “hazard” are they reducing? The burning is undertaken to protect government assets, homes, businesses, and roads. It is not instigated to protect our cultural sites or the ecologies that they lie within. In fact, the buildup of leaf litter and dry undergrowth on the unmanaged landscape instead encourages and fuels hot, destructive wildfires like those we witnessed across the country in the summer of 2019–20.

To date current strategies employed by national parks to manage the engravings are, at best, passive: the engraved lines are cleaned to highlight

them, the surrounding scrub is cut back, and in some cases the engraving sites are protected by fences, boardwalks, and sleeper borders, making our ancient cultural galleries appear more like tombs to the dead.³³ At worst, national parks protect some of our sites by deliberately allowing them to become overgrown and hidden within dense bushland, lost to all except perhaps on a few maps locked away in back offices that we will never be allowed to access.

Thinking of the future for the engravings raises more questions than it answers and more problems than it solves. Do we leave the sites shrouded and protected among the bushland to save them from wasting away in the elements? Or do we draw attention to them by requesting to protect them? Drawing attention can be fatal for them, however, as national parks will often signpost them, which draws in crowds to view them, while leaving them unprotected from vandalism and damage. Do we say goodbye to them, or do we continue to work on them? Will our reengraving them be considered a form of culture or vandalism? Should we seek permission and is it permissible?

Instead of keeping people away, perhaps custodians should be consulted and encouraged to redo the engravings. This would require that the government acknowledge our existence and even our title over the land. It would be an admission that we are still here and are not some faraway culture or people. The government has been creating a register of Aboriginal traditional owners of some areas of land under the government's jurisdiction, which, when coinciding with Aboriginal heritage listing, allows Aboriginal owners some governance over their land.³⁴ While there is a register of Aboriginal owners for the land around Sydney, no Aboriginal heritage listing has ever been granted for these lands as of this writing, even though the land holds untold amounts of Aboriginal heritage.³⁵

THE SYDNEY STYLE

As Aboriginal people we need to continually practice culture to ensure its future. Through my art making I work toward keeping not just our images but also our culture alive. I draw on the images of our engravings and visual culture to represent what I perceive to be a "Sydney style."



F26. *Yurora* (Full of life), 2018, mixed media on canvas. A collaboration representing two generations of D'harawal women by Shannon Foster and her daughter, Jade Foster-Guadalupe.

While I admire and appreciate other visual cultures, such as the dots of the Central Desert or the intricate cross-hatching of the Top End of northern Australia, they do not resonate with me and how I relate to our distinct visual culture here in Sydney. My eyes have always seen sandstone artworks, engraved icons of stylistically abbreviated local animal forms or hands stenciled onto sandstone cave walls in yellow, red, and white ochers. This is the visual imagery that I re-create in my artworks in the pursuit of reinstating a Sydney style back into the local psyche (fig. 26).

I recently discovered that my great-grandfather, Tom Foster, seems to have had the same idea long before I was ever even thought of. Tom was an active and well-known cultural, ceremonial man and leading figure in the La Perouse Mission during the 1930s. He coordinated many events, both political and cultural, including the 1938 Day of Mourning



F27. Sandstone engraving at La Perouse by Tom Foster and his family to commemorate the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, 1932.

protest, where he gave an important speech that is still spoken about today. When I undertook research with Dr. Amanda Harris, another layer of Tom's history was uncovered. In digging through the archives, Amanda unearthed images of an engraving that Tom had created with my uncles on a prominent piece of sandstone in La Perouse (fig. 27). The engraving was made to commemorate the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932 and depicts a hunter about to spear a kangaroo. The kangaroo is facing forward, with its head turned around to look back at the hunter. I had seen this kangaroo, the quintessential icon of my great-grandfather's artworks, many times. Tom had burned the same icon into the boomerangs he created (fig. 28), which had since found their way through space and time and returned to us in the ultimate act of rematriation.³⁶

I cannot help but feel that the kangaroo is doing more than just watching the hunter. To me the kangaroo is looking to the past in the same



F28. Pokerwork boomerang showing iconic rear-facing kangaroo by Tom Foster, 1934.

ways that I am, as I desire something different from what I have experienced for those who come after me and imagine the possibilities for our future.³⁷ This engraving tells me that my great-grandfather looked at the same ancient engravings that I have. He absorbed the iconography, reimagined it, brought it into his time and place, and left it there in the stone for us to see. And we found it. We also found him, and in so doing we have found ourselves.

CONCLUSIONS

Our engraving sites are of greater value than a scientific study, a tourist destination, or a fading relic of a time gone by. Our engravings prove we are real; we still exist despite the ongoing onslaught of colonization that has sought to erase us and all that we know. These places are a reminder that despite my fair skin and green eyes, I am Aboriginal. It is more than just the fact that I can find the engravings or that I know where to go



F29. Emerging Knowledge Keeper Jett Roberts with our Ancestors.

and how to get there. These are just practicalities. It is the spirit of these images that beats within me, that sets my heart to beat to the rhythm of Country here. These engravings were created for me, for this time and place, for this very purpose, right here, right now.

And as I twist and weave the bamuru of these knowledges, I lay down new folds and loops for future grasses to embed into. We work within the gaps, the spaces in between, to create a form, to build a vessel, that can hold our past, our present, and our futures.

Didjariguru Guwany'i'o'miya (Thank you for remembering our Ancestors).

NOTES

1. Bodkin and Robertson, *D'harawal*.
2. Martin, *Please Knock*.
3. Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*.
4. Goodall and Cadzow, *Rivers and Resilience*.
5. Thorpe, "Transformative Praxis." "Blak" is used to subvert the power that the Western colonial language has over our cultures as First Nations people of the land now known as Australia. While the word "black" describes the color of skin, "blak" is used to include our culture as well as those of us who, by the forces of government-imposed assimilation policies, no longer have skin color that would be considered black.
6. Foster, "Mungari Buldyan"
7. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism."
8. Carlson, *Politics of Identity*.
9. Foster, Kinniburgh, and Wanne, "There's No Place."
10. Foster, "White Bread Dreaming."
11. Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority*; "Aboriginal Welfare."
12. Shannon Foster, "Because of Her I Can't: The Rematriation of Her(Story) in His(Story)," *IndigenousX*, May 9, 2018, <https://indigenousx.com.au/shannon-foster-because-of-her-i-cant-the-rematriation-of-herstory-in-hisstory/>.
13. Morgan, *Unsettled Places*.
14. Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority*.
15. Muller, "De-colonisation"; Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming*; Rose, *On the Fringe of Curriculum*.
16. Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming*, 202.
17. Behrendt, *Finding Eliza*.
18. Beasley, "Breaking of the 'Great Australian Silence,'" 1.
19. Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming*, 216.

20. Beasley, "Breaking of the 'Great Australian Silence,'" 1.
21. Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson, "Legacy of Racism."
22. Pascoe, *Dark Emu*.
23. "Aboriginal Welfare."
24. Konishi, "First Nations Scholars."
25. McGregor, "'Breed Out the Colour.'"
26. Thomas, *Some Myths and Legends*.
27. Nunn and Reid, "Aboriginal Memories of Inundation."
28. Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past*.
29. Gilchrist, *Everywhen*.
30. Malaspinas et al., "Genomic History."
31. Wright, "Politics of Writing."
32. Pascoe, *Dark Emu*.
33. "Grotto Point Aboriginal Engraving Site," NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, accessed January 19, 2020, <https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/things-to-do/aboriginal-sites/grotto-point-aboriginal-engraving-site>.
34. "Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System," NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, updated August 8, 2019, <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/aboriginal-cultural-heritage/protect-and-manage/aboriginal-heritage-information-management-system>.
35. Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past*.
36. Tuck, "Rematriating Curriculum Studies."
37. Tuck, "Breaking Up with Deleuze."

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